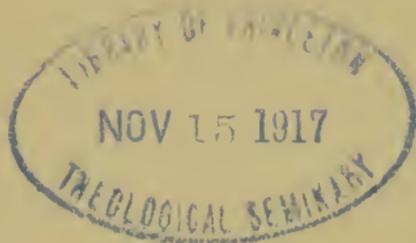


# PRAYER IN ITS PRESENT DAY ASPECTS

· JAMES M. CAMPBELL ·





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# Prayer in Its Present Day Aspects

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JAMES M. CAMPBELL, D. D.

*Author of "Grow Old Along With Me," "The  
Heart of the Gospel," etc., etc.*



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## Foreword

**I**N the present day, as perhaps never before, the subject of prayer is being pushed into the forefront. There are many things to account for this. Everywhere there is a spirit of unrest and uncertainty; everything is being shaken to its foundations; the old order is breaking up; economic problems are becoming acute; a large part of the world is in the convulsions of war; thrones are toppling to their fall; a materialistic civilization has collapsed; changes that will affect the very structure of the social life of the world are coming, not gently and gradually, but suddenly and violently. By the clash of contending forces many are stunned and bewildered. They know not what to do, they know not where to turn. They feel deeply the need of higher help. Their spiritual natures are urgently asserting themselves, and are struggling for expression; but they know not how to pray, or what to pray for, as they ought. They are seeking light and leading. Much of the current teaching is to them meaningless. Their thoughts do not run in the old doctrinal grooves. They require to have the terms of the past retranslated that

they may be brought into harmony with the thought and life of the present. In a word, they need to be established in what St. Peter calls "the present truth" (2 Pet. i. 12); that is, "the truth that is with us" (R. V.); or, in other words, the particular aspects of the eternal truth suited to the existing conditions and demands. In the endeavour to do something to meet this situation this little book has been written.

It may be added that the book itself is the aftermath of a study of Christian prayer in a volume entitled "The Place of Prayer in the Christian Religion"; and the subject of prayer is taken up where it was there left off, and is considered in its present-day aspects and applications.

J. M. C.

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## I

### Prayer as Related to the Modern Man's Conception of God

**P**ERHAPS no movement in religious thought, within recent years, has been so significant as the gradual change of center from divine sovereignty to divine Fatherhood; nor has any similar movement wrought more subtle changes in our views of prayer. This movement carries us back to Christ in our prayer-thought; for upon divine Fatherhood all His teaching and practice regarding prayer were based. Not that He ignored other relationships; for well He knew that no single term can include all that exists between God and man; but that of Fatherhood was the closest, the deepest, and the dearest. Indeed it is the only one to which He directly refers. Never once does He speak of God as a king, but always as Father. In the opening words of "the prayer that teaches us how to pray," God's kingdom is implied, "Our Father" being represented as having a kingdom; but in this double relationship of Father and king it is the former in which prayer has its vital root.

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Prayer begins where religion itself begins, in the recognition of God as a Father. In the Christian religion God is not set forth as a sovereign seeking the submission of His subjects, but as a Father seeking the love and obedience of His children. He is not an offended monarch whose chief concern is the honour of His violated law, but a loving Father whose chief concern is the recovery of His sinful children. He is a Father first; and after that a king, or anything else; and it is in the light of this relation, which is the most central, that all His other relations are to be understood; and it is by it that the manner of man's approach to God is to be determined.

In the Old Testament we have divine Fatherhood as a *figure*. "Like as a father pitieth his children, so the Lord pitieth them that fear Him." In the New Testament we have divine fatherhood as a *fact*. God is not merely *like* a Father, He *is* a Father. When we pray we are to say, "Our Father." But divine Fatherhood is more than a fact; it is also a *force*—a force active and operative, moving upon the spirit of man to draw out his love and confidence. The Father longs for fellowship with all His children. He waits for it; He works for it. He says to each one, "Wilt thou not from this time cry unto Me 'My Father,'" and bends low His ear to catch the

first faint whisperings of His name. The outgoing of His fatherly love is creative of prayer. It brings His wandering child to His side that he may walk with Him and talk with Him; and when that is accomplished Father and child have found their own.

Almost equal in importance to the change of center from divine sovereignty to divine Fatherhood is the change of center from divine transcendence to divine immanence. In their wondering joy over the far-reaching effects of this change, many have come to regard it more in the nature of a discovery than of a recovery —of a sunrise than of a parting of the clouds. But the doctrine of the divine immanence is not new. It has existed in some form ever since man credited the universe with a soul. It is one of the obscured truths which the early Church brought to light. From the third to the fifth century it was regnant in the teaching of the Greek fathers. Then the dark shadow of Augustinian theology fell upon it, and for over a thousand years it was well-nigh eclipsed. Its revival in these modern days has brought to many a clearer and keener sense of the presence of God. No longer do they look upon Him as above the skies, in some distant world, but as down among His children, where a father ought to be. He is in the life of the world. He dwells within the spirit of man.

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“Closer is He than breathing, nearer than hands or feet.” He controls the world from within instead of coming down upon it from without. He answers prayer not by interfering with His established order but by working in harmony with it. The modern man thrusts from him the idea of a God outside the universe, saying with Goethe:

“ No, such a God my worship may not win,  
Who lets the world about His fingers spin,  
A thing extern : My God must rule within ;  
And whom I own for Father, God, Creator,  
Holds nature in Himself, Himself in nature ;  
And in His kindly arms embraced, the whole  
Doth live and move by His pervading Soul.”

Christian Science, and kindred cults, have opened the door for many into this temple of truth. They have brought them into touch with the Infinite and Eternal. God is made to seem near ; but in a dim, hazy sort of way. By being robbed of personality He ceases to be an object of direct communion. For who can pray to a “principle,” or essence ; or to a nebulous entity called “The Infinite” ?

In this conception of God there has been much gain ; but taken alone, and carried to its logical conclusion, it runs into pantheism, and ends in identifying God and nature. From the premise, “God is everything,” it is only a short

step to the conclusion, "Everything is God." And if God is everything, the idea of two separate and self-conscious personalities is ruled out, and no place is left in life for prayer.

Jesus, knowing the difficulty men would have in retaining the sense of God's presence while holding to His immanence, combines the two conceptions of God, which taken separately compose two hemispheres of truth, and which taken together make up the full circle. Referring to the dawning of the new spiritual era He says, "The hour cometh, and now is, when the true worshippers shall worship the Father in spirit and in truth; for such doth the Father seek to be His worshippers. God is spirit, and they that worship Him must worship in spirit and in truth" (John iv. 23, 24). It is the Universal Father who is the Universal Life; it is the Father who is enthroned in the highest heavens whose presence fills the universe. The God who is "spirit" is not shadowy, intangible, illusive. His presence is real and personal. He is "the Father"; the Father of all men. To Him we can pray; from Him we can receive answers to our prayers; in His fatherly bosom we can bury our heads in the hour of desolation.

Prayer offered to such a Father-Spirit is not, as Emerson has put it, "a sally into the un-found infinite." It is the conscious communion

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of spirit with spirit, the response of our spirits to the call of the Unseen Father, who is ever near, and who yearns for our fellowship, and in the knowledge of whose personal interest and love our souls find their supreme satisfaction.

Paul in his teaching follows Jesus in uniting these two aspects of truth. He speaks of "One God and Father of all, who is over all, and through all, and in all" (Eph. iv. 6). He is distinct from the world yet in it; *over all* as a transcendent being standing behind outward phenomena—a loving Father "keeping watch over His own"; *through all* as an immanent life pervading the world; *in all* as the indwelling presence who is the ground of being, and the source of every blessing.

In any satisfactory interpretation of prayer these two conceptions of God must be taken into account. If transcendence be taken alone an absentee God will be the result; if immanence be taken alone an abstract God will be the result. Immanence deifies the human; transcendence humanizes the divine; the one brings God down from above, the other shows His face and heart; the one gives a God who is near, the other a Father who is responsive; the one brings us into the porch of the temple, and leaves us there; the other takes us through the open door into the temple itself where we find a living, personal Friend, who listens to

our cry, whose help we can evoke and secure, and who with His own hand ministers to our every need.

It is at this point that Eucken, from whom we expected so much, has utterly failed us. No one in these modern days has given greater prominence to the idea of "a Spiritual Life working in and through man," but he has not always been clear as to the personal qualities of the Spiritual Life which he sees at work in man and in the world, much less has he come to recognize it as the presence of the Immanent Father. Hence he has virtually nothing to say of personal communion; nor in all his writings is there anything like a call to prayer, and hardly a reference to the subject. By substituting a philosophy for a religion the very idea of prayer has been evaporated.

In order to the production of the prayer-spirit it is not enough to believe in God's presence, or even to be aware of it. He must be known in personal relations. In this world He has always dwelt as its immanent life; but men could not get a clear vision of Him, or a firm grip upon Him until He objectified Himself. Blind to His presence, they have looked upon Him as remote, and have kept crying, "Oh, that Thou wouldst rend the heavens and come down." The time came when that deep cry of the universal heart was answered. In Jesus the

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heavens were rent; the unseen God was made visible; the God who lived in a distant heaven came down. As the one in whom the self-revelation of God to man culminated, Jesus could say, "He that hath seen Me hath seen the Father." It is to the Father that He brings us as the soul's ultimate. Christian prayer begins when in the Immanent God the Father is found, and not before.

Happy, thrice happy are those who have learned of Jesus to look up to the All-Pervading Life, actively present in the world and in the soul of man, and say:

" No human eyes Thy face may see,  
No human thought Thy form may know,  
But all creation dwells in Thee,  
And Thy great life through all doth flow,  
And yet—oh, strange and wondrous  
thought;  
Thou art a God who hearest prayer,  
And every heart with sorrow fraught,  
To seek Thy present aid may dare."

These beautiful lines need for their completion the added thought that the one to whom we "dare" to go in every strait is one who bids us come, and of whose welcome we are sure because He is our real, and very own Father.

## II

### Prayer as Related to the Modern Man's Conception of Himself

**N**OT less marked than man's new conception of God is his new conception of himself. What the man of to-day thinks of himself is very different from what the man of a past generation thought of himself. Belief in the doctrine of divine Fatherhood has given him a new sense of dignity and personal worth. So long as the thought of sovereignty overshadowed that of Fatherhood manhood was crushed out, and man spoke of himself as "a worm and no man," and grovelled in the dust of unmanly self-abasement. Since he has come to look upon God as his Father all that has changed. He now speaks of himself as a man and no worm. He glories in his heavenly kinship. Accepting his lowly origin, on the physical side, as the son of a molecule he exults in the thought that, on the spiritual side, he is a son of the living God. Even if he has disavowed his sonship, and has practically become a child of the devil, by doing his works,

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he knows that he is a child of God, made in His image, made for His friendship, made "to love and be loved by Him forever," and that things will never be right with him until he returns to his Father. Within him, at his worst, are to be found germs of good, remnants of his better nature. Hence there is in him something to which religion can make its appeal. His better self is not dead but sleepeth, and only needs to be awakened. Its unappeasable yearnings bespeak its parentage.

" Every inward aspiration  
Is God's angel undefiled ;  
And in every ' O my Father,'  
Slumbers deep a ' Here, my child.' "

This new conception of man concerning himself, and its consequent new feeling towards himself has in many ways affected his prayer life. It has given him a new spirit of confidence. The modern man is very sure of God. He may not always be living upon intimate terms with Him, he may even be keeping Him at arm's length, but he believes that He is within call, and feels certain of His help, if he should happen to need it, which he occasionally does.

But with this new sense of personal worth there has unfortunately come to the modern man a sense of self-importance, and of self-sufficiency. Humility is not one of his dis-

tinguishing graces. His smug satisfaction with himself is equalled only by his confidence in what he can achieve. So greatly has his power increased in the realm of nature that he has come to believe himself capable of bringing to pass any end he may desire. He belongs to a generation who proclaim :

“ That which they have done, but earnestly  
of the things they shall do.”

His general port and attitude is that of one who is sufficient unto himself. Limitations of any kind he is slow to acknowledge ; weakness and failure he is loth to confess. He wants to stand upon his own feet, and live his own life, without the help of any one—God included. In his pridefulness of heart he mounts a pedestal, and shouts to the world his declaration of independence.

But a declaration of independence comes with poor grace from the lips of a finite, sinful mortal. If he only knew it, he presents a pitiable spectacle when making it. In his case the words of one of old, “ My soul shall make her boast in the Lord, the humble shall hear thereof and be glad,” would have to be changed into, “ My soul shall make her boast in myself, the humble shall hear thereof and be sad.”

The direful consequences of this false attitude Jesus strikingly sets forth in the story of the

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Pharisee and the publican, who stood together in the temple praying, the one boasting of his goodness, the other confessing his sin. Pointing to the latter He said, "I tell you, this man went down to his house justified rather than the other; for every one that exalteth himself shall be humbled; but he that humbleth himself shall be exalted" (Luke xviii. 14).

x That this attitude is inimical to the spirit and practice of prayer goes without the saying; for prayer is rooted in the sense of dependence upon a higher power. Schleiermacher maintains that from the feeling of dependence all religion has sprung; and nothing could be more self-obvious. Yet many claim to be sufficient unto themselves. The Stoics did so; and Emerson building upon their foundation developed the doctrine of self-reliance, which in its extreme form rules God out of life.

In the present day the doctrine of self-sufficiency is being widely promulgated. New Thought and kindred cults have dressed it up in attractive form. They have outdone the Pharisees whom Jesus condemned for their boastfulness. Their attitude betrays a subtle kind of religious self-conceit. In their system of thought there is no room for prayer, for the reason that there is no need of it. In the affirmations with which they fortify themselves God is not mentioned. They assert "I am

strong," "I am wise," "I am good." They believe that "the growing soul must realize that it has within itself all that is required," and is therefore under no necessity to go out of itself for help.

It is utter ignorance of himself that leads any one to imagine that he has no need to look farther than himself for supplies. Sooner or later every one comes to an end of his own resources. He has to struggle with difficulties for which he has no adequate wisdom, and to face unexpected trials for which he has no adequate strength. Sometimes tragedies come which make the very bottom fall out of his life. And when these are absent the daily stress and strain of a dualistic world, which is not merely imperfect but alien, forces himself out of himself and leads him to look up and cry, "I will look to the mountains. From whence shall my help come? My help cometh from the Lord who made heaven and earth." He prays because he cannot help praying. There is no other source of help open to him save that which prayer makes available. So long as he is what he is, and the world is what it is, the need of prayer can never be transcended; for it belongs to the very nature of things that the insufficient must ever seek the All-Sufficient.

Man's dependence upon God is complete. It extends not only to his physical life but also to

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his spiritual life. He lives in God. From His environing presence he draws his spiritual sustenance just as he draws his physical sustenance from the physical world about him. Lying in the Father's bosom he is nourished by the indrawal of the Father's life. In spite of all the advancement he has made his need of God has not been outgrown. He has already come a long way in his ascent out of the brute life, but he has not yet arrived; he is only emerging, and is still far from the goal. He is a dependent child who has not yet reached his majority. His need of God is as great as ever it was, and hence his need for prayer is as urgent as ever it was.

What is true of man's individual dependence is equally true of his collective dependence. The whole world hangs upon God's skirts. There are times when nations turn to Him in their helplessness as their only remaining source of help, and hasten to build in the valley of adversity the altar which they neglected to build on the mountain top of prosperity. Such a time is now upon us. The collapse of a civilization built upon materialism and militarism; the confessed inadequacy of man to answer life's challenge, to solve life's problems, and to meet the unparalleled crisis now before him, have deepened his sense of creaturely dependence, and widened the opening of his

heart, in filial trust, to the Father of all. He is less disposed to put his trust in "reeking tube and iron shard"; and, with clearer vision, is coming to see that God is still to be taken into account in human affairs; that He has not vacated the throne of the universe; that He has the last word to say in the settlement of every world-controversy; and that in the final far-off issue of events His eternal purpose cannot fail of accomplishment. He is coming also to see that by the way of prayer, and none other, can he come into adjustment with God's will, secure His blessing, and share in His ultimate triumph.

### III

## Prayer as Related to the Modern Man's Conception of His Fellowmen

**T**HE modern man is coming to possess "a new feeling towards humanity." Instead of looking upon his fellowmen as strangers and aliens he is beginning to look upon them as brothers; "bone of his bone, and flesh of his flesh," and to recognize their brotherly rights, and cherish towards them brotherly interest and love. There has been awakened within him a new social conscience, which is delivering him from selfish individualism, and leading him to shoulder joyfully the full burden of his social responsibilities.

That this new sense of brotherhood has been born out of the revelation of divine Fatherhood is a matter of simple historical fact. Whenever men have stood within the circle of Christian enlightenment and have come to know God as their Father and themselves as His sons, they have come to recognize their fellowmen as their brothers; members with them of the selfsame family, heirs with them of the self-

same heritage. Consequent upon this changed attitude they have come to adopt as the fundamental article of their creed a new social trinity consisting of Fatherhood, sonship, and brotherhood; and in filial love and service towards God, and in fraternal love and service towards men, their religion is summed up. Praying as sons of God they stand with one hand within that of their Father, and the other in that of their brother, seeking to bring them together; thus filling up that which is lacking of Christ's mediatorial mission.

This genuine brotherhood from which prayer naturally springs is not to be confounded with the artificial, skin-deep substitute about which shallow mortals prate, and which too often leads its proud possessors to patronize rather than to fraternize. It is a vital thing, rooted in an organic relationship. It may be ignored, but it cannot be destroyed; the sense of it may be lost, but the reality of it never. Sons of one Father are brothers one of another. A son is a son forever; a brother is a brother forever. A common parentage implies community of interests and mutuality of obligations. Brothers are debtors the one to the other; they owe one another all the good they can do them. So vast is this debt that this little life-time is all too short in which to discharge it.

It has taken this old world a long time to

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gain even a glimmering of the truth that men are brothers all ; equally dear to the All-Father, and equally bound to seek each other's welfare. To this wide place the Church has been slow in coming, but she is surely getting there. The errors by which her sympathies were fettered are passing away, the scales are falling from her eyes, and she is acknowledging it to be her bounden duty to labour and to pray, not merely for those within a limited circle, but for all men everywhere.

It must have been from the beginning the aim of Jesus to teach His disciples that they owed to every man an interest in their prayers, but in His first lesson on prayer it was impossible for Him to give to them the whole of this great truth, for the reason that they were not prepared to receive it. As a step towards it, He taught them to pray for the whole household of faith. The idea of prayer for the whole human family, which many fondly believe to be expressed in the Lord's Prayer, could not then be given. A truth so large, and so startlingly new, had to be taught by degrees. In the same gradual way Christ dealt with slavery. An institution so deeply rooted in the social life could not be abolished at once ; but when through the influence of Christianity the slave was looked upon as a man and a brother, slavery was doomed.

The new way of looking at man, which we have learned from Christ, carries with it momentous consequences. It leads to the destruction of all race and class prejudices. It overthrows the dictum of Roman philosophy that "a man is wolf to the man he does not know." The Christian is a friend to the man he does not know. In every stranger he sees a brother. He knows no man after the flesh; distinctions of rank and race vanish from his sight. Skins differ, souls are alike. All men occupy a common plane of relationship, and have rights that ought to be respected. Towards those whose need is sorest the largest stream of compassion flows out; and to every disinherited member of society is freely rendered every form of helpful service which one brother can minister to another.

Now, the brotherly responsibilities in these brotherly relations are not fulfilled until one man prays for another. A brother is bound to pray for a brother, for this is the highest service he can ever render him; and if it is withheld love's greatest debt remains uncanceled. There are some things a Christian man can do by proxy, but prayer is not one of them. Prayer is something all can give, and it is the best thing any one can give. When other forms of ministry are denied the praying soul can say, "Silver and gold have I none, but such as I

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have give I unto thee," and the gift of himself which he gives in prayer is of all that may be given the richest and the most enriching.

The calls for this personal kind of ministry are very urgent and very varied. Sometimes they come to us from within the circle of Christian brotherhood in the form of direct requests for prayer after the manner of the apostolic appeal, "Brethren, pray for us." Sometimes they come from those without, who are in dire distress; as in the case told by the poet Whittier of a woman closely veiled who glided ghost-like into the Quaker Meeting House, and laid on the desk a piece of paper, upon which were written the words, "Pray for me," and then passed "back into the night from which she came." Sometimes they come as spirit-voices out of the enveloping spiritual universe, in which the limitations of the flesh fall away, and spirit touches spirit, and in some mysterious way we are drawn out in prayer to those who until then were not in our thoughts. Concerning the latter experience we have the interpretative lines—

"I cannot tell why there should come to me  
A thought of some one miles and miles away,  
In swift insistence on the memory,  
Unless there be a need that I should pray.

“ Perhaps just then my friend has fiercest fight,  
A more appalling weakness, a decay  
Of courage, darkness, some lost sense of sight ;  
And so in case he needs my prayer, I pray.

“ Friend, do the same for me if I intrude  
Unmasked upon you in some crowded day ;  
Give me a moment's prayer as interlude ;  
Be sure I need it, therefore, pray.”

Can we imagine anything in which true brother-  
hood is more fully actualized than in the in-  
terchange of service involved in this mutual  
ministry of prayer ?

## IV

### Prayer as Related to Man's New Conception of Life

**V**ERY silently has the old conception of life as a probation been displaced by the new conception of life as an education. Man is no longer looked upon as under trial, but as under training; he is no longer looked upon as a candidate for eternity, working in the dark until the outcome of his career is disclosed, and his final destiny awarded; but as having already entered upon his eternal course; and as, under the tutelage of the heavenly Father, being carried through an educational and disciplinary process to which no limits can be prescribed.

According to this new educational view, life is not detached and fragmentary, but is all of a piece, its several parts being bound together as links in an endless chain. The past, the present, and the future have no gaps between them. As the past lives in us, so does the future. Heaven and hell are not distant dreams, but present realities. They have their

beginnings in this life. Both are already within us; the one as the reign of righteousness, the other as the reign of sin. The future will be the continuation and completion of the present, and will grow out of it as harvest grows out of spring. Increase is the law of life, and tendencies once awakened move with ever accelerated momentum. Education implies growth. Each succeeding stage of development leads to still greater expansion. This order God follows in the production of character; and this order those who would assist Him with their prayers must follow also. They must enter into His unresting, unhasting, ever-enlarging educationary process, working in harmony with it, creating for Him a favourable atmosphere, vitalizing and making effective any human agency which He may employ, and never slacking until the moral purpose which He has in view in every life has been attained.

The unqualified acceptance of the educationary view of life has, however, led to the putting of such great stress upon the law of moral increase that we are in danger of overlooking the possibility of moral change; and by regarding habit as something that can be congealed into a fixed and eternal state, shutting off from man all opportunity of escaping from his past, and of changing his moral descent into a moral ascent. The admission that the par-

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alysis of the will may reach an incurable stage empties life of the last part and particle of moral significance. For moral character always implies the possibility of change. It postulates a *may*, never a *must*. It is for man himself by his fateful choice to decide what it shall be.

Strangely enough, in the idea of necessitated character which has found lodgment in the twin doctrines of heredity and environment, the old Calvinism which had been thrust out of the door has returned by the window, and that which has been discarded as a theological dogma has been accepted as a doctrine of science. Its acceptance has been fraught with consequences grave and far reaching, for if a man's character is made for him rather than by him, he is reduced to an automaton, and is stripped of the last vestige of freedom and accountability. But man cannot be *made* good or bad. Goodness and badness must always be freely chosen. However much heredity may limit freedom, it cannot altogether take it away; however much it may condition character, it cannot determine it. The determining power resides in the man himself; who can use or abuse his heredity. Bad heredity he can overcome; good heredity he can take advantage of, so that it will minister to his highest development. When his teeth have been

set on edge by the sour grapes which the fathers have eaten, a fierce struggle is called for; and when the tendency to goodness has been transmitted the fight is easier; but whether his heredity be against him or for him he must ever remain the *former* of his own character, the arbiter of his own destiny.

So is it with the law of environment, by which a man's life is so largely moulded; it merely conditions character, but does not create it. Yet strange to say, in the present-day humanistic schemes of human redemption, salvation is declared to be by environment; and the position is frankly taken that "the help we once expected from invisible, incorporeal agencies we are now demanding from man. Society is to save the man." Then, Heaven help us, for who is to save society? And how can there be a saved society unless there be first of all saved men? Give a man a better environment and you will help him, but you cannot essentially change him; on the other hand make the man new and he will change his environment. The worst environment can be overcome through God's grace moving men to new choices, and issues, and without that the most favourable environment will avail nothing.

Within the laws of heredity and environment, and in harmony with them, prayer operates.

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As a moral force it is the same in its nature as that by which God is moving upon the hearts of men as He touches the deep springs of moral action. Being moral, its influence is suasive. It impels but does not compel. It sometimes brings to bear upon the one prayed for a pressure so great as almost to seem irresistible, yet in the last analysis it never overpowers the will. God Himself can do nothing more than persuade men, and reason with them; He works upon them in harmony with the laws of mind which He has ordained; yet within these laws there is nothing which He cannot do to meet the challenge of faith on the part of His praying children.

*he can always  
yes*

Because character is a fluid, and not a solid; because man, at any time in his earthly career, can break through every entanglement, and come out into the open, as a free man under Christ, he is always a suitable subject for prayer. But once admit that he may become fixed in a state of invincible incorrigibility; that he may sink so low that the divine image in which he was made may become totally effaced; that he may revert to type, going back to the animal plane, and so perishing like the beasts, and he will be regarded as past praying for; and the missionary motive which leads others to pray for his salvation will be totally destroyed. No one will pray for one whom he deems utterly hope-

less any more than he will pour water at the root of a dead tree.

Many who have been given up as hopeless have been saved. Mothers have continued to pray for children who were looked upon as beyond redemption, and whom Christian friends have abandoned to their fate, and their faith and hope have been justified in seeing the incurable cured. From the rubbish heap modern science has rescued many precious treasures; and from the rubbish heap of human lives prayer has rescued many a precious gem for the diadem of the King. Life at its worst has hope at the heart of it; and because of that there exists a valid ground for persevering prayer. Without hope prayer would die; with prayer to sustain it it lives on forever.

## Prayer as Related to the New World in Which Man Finds Himself

**T**HE world in which the man of to-day finds himself is in many respects a very different world from that of his fathers. Were they to come back to it they would find themselves strangers in a strange place. That the prayer-thought and life of the man of to-day should catch a certain tone and colour from his world is inevitable. In its inner essence prayer is ever the same, but it grows as man grows, and changes as his world changes.

Of the new world in which the man of to-day finds himself, it may be said that it is—

1. *A larger world.* By every new discovery of science the walls of man's house of life have been expanded, and his horizon has been widened. He has been brought into a roomier place. Instead of being "cribbed, cabined, confined," he has acquired more room in which to live, to work, and to grow; and hence more room in which to pray. He is constantly tapping new sources of power. The world is

yielding up to him treasures long held in reserve. Its resources appear to him illimitable, its possibilities boundless. The old words, "All things are yours," have taken on a new meaning. All things that belong to him as a child of God, and an heir of the ages, are his to use, to improve, and to enjoy. With so much already in possession he is prepared for any wonder that prayer may bring. Being accustomed to the great things, he expects greater things.

We see how man's world has enlarged by the use of the telegraph and telephone, which have become matters of daily necessity, and especially by the wireless telegraph, and still later the wireless telephone—by which he can speak across continents without any connecting medium save that which nature supplies. Add to these the rapid means of transportation, and of the spread of news, aerial navigation, stellar photography, and the discovery of new substances such as radium, and it will be seen how much wider man's world has become. These discoveries and inventions have not only increased man's power; they have also made the idea of his being able to open up communication with heaven a thing no longer to be scouted by the scientific mind. A concrete example of this increase of power is furnished by the incident of President Wilson pressing a button at Washington, and setting in motion all the machinery

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in the Panama Exposition at San Francisco, and at the same time lighting up all the buildings and grounds with electricity. With such an object lesson before us why should it be thought a thing incredible that man by his prayers should set in motion forces in the spirit world which should bring about results more wonderful than those wrought in the physical realm?

2. *Upon the whole, a vastly better world.* The tide of human history has ebbed and flowed but its general movement has been onward. Every change has not been a change for the better, and there is something in human nature that still makes possible at any time a wild plunge into the abyss of darkness, yet taking things in the large, the prophecy of the Hebrew seer has been fulfilled: "for brass I will bring gold, and for iron I will bring silver, and for wood brass, and for stones iron." It is a question whether the higher altitude attained by a few great personalities in the past has ever been surpassed, but there is no question whatever as to the general uplift of the race, despite its occasional fearful back-slippings. The common type is higher. Some of the sturdier virtues may not be as pronounced, but there is more love, more charity, more kindness, more chivalry, more sympathy, more brotherliness in the world than there ever was. Hence it has be-

come a more comfortable and desirable place to live in. So well satisfied are people with it that they have no desire to leave it. Heaven is no longer sought after as a compensation for the misery of the present, but is looked upon as an additional asset which rightly belongs to a growing life. And yet it is as painfully felt as ever that this world cannot meet the deepest desires of the soul; that man is too big to be satisfied with what it has to offer. Even when surface indications point to satisfaction with material things, beneath the surface there is often an appreciation of the supremacy of spiritual interests, and a longing for the liberation of the soul from the bondage of sense.

Between these contending sentiments prayer has to mediate. While taking due account of the undying interest of man in eternal things, it has to make its appeal in a world which has grown wonderfully interesting and attractive; and for its appeal to be effective it must hold out the promise of still greater satisfaction with life. The challenge of its ability to make this promise good ought gladly to be accepted, there being the utmost ground for confidence that in every case in which it has free course it can repeat the miracle of changing the water of life into wine.

3. *A world of mystery.* Science has helped

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to clear up many of the mysteries by which the heart of man has been oppressed, but it has opened up other and greater ones; and this old world is just as full of mystery as ever. There are things which perplex the man of to-day as much as they perplexed the first man that began to brood over them. Sin, suffering, and death are still here; and they are neither to be denied nor ignored.

But there is light shining in the darkness. Between the background and the foreground of mystery by which man is surrounded lies a bit of clear space upon which light falls from the heavens above him. Here he kneels in prayer, finding for every mystery one solution—God. And so long as life's mysteries last, to God he must ever repair for the good reason that he has nowhere else to go.

4. *A world still in the making.* Everything here is unfinished. The work of creation is still going on. The creative energy of God flows through the world in a constant stream. In its operations there are no closed circuits. The whole universe is open to God, and every part of it is plastic to the touch of His fashioning fingers. The world is not decayed and dying, and getting ready for its hearse; but as Tennyson puts it,

“ This fine old world of ours is but a child  
Still in its go-cart.”

It is the same with the world on its human side. Souls are in the making; society is in the making; the Church is in the making; the kingdom of God is in the making. There is a predestined end to which all things move; the eternal purposes of God are being carried out on time; the circle is being completed, and the world is coming back to the divine ideal from which it has fallen, and for which it was created.

In a mobile world prayer finds a fitting sphere of action. Indeed, no other kind of a world could find room for it. From a solid world—a world in which all things are fixed by eternal fate, or by eternal law, it would be forever excluded. A world in the making needs it, and welcomes it, as one of the formative forces by which the good work begun within it shall be carried to completion.

5. *A world on its way to redemption.* What a difference it will make in a man's praying whether he regards the world as on its way to destruction, or as on its way to redemption. Now, whatever the future may bring, evidence abounds that there is in the world a present power working for repair. Wrong things are not allowed to remain unrighted, either by man or God. Reformatory movements spring up when things get to their worst; at its lowest ebb the tide turns; the decayed tree sends up new shoots from the roots. Watching this life-

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giving power at work we exclaim with Madame De Staël,

“ O earth, all bathed with blood and tears, yet  
never  
Hast thou ceased putting forth thy fruits and  
flowers.”

This vision of the world many of the greatest minds have missed. Matthew Arnold found in Hebrew history “a power not ourselves working for righteousness.” Eucken finds in human history a vital force working for moral ends. What both alike have failed to see is the presence in the world of a personal Power working for redemption.

This is the Christian conception of the world, and it is the one which the praying man must take in order that his prayer may rise to the height of its power. Prayer comes to have a new meaning and a new value when it is seen to be a coöperative force by which God is helped in the work of the world's redemption. The world needs saving. It has gone wrong and has to be put right; it has fallen from the divine ideal and needs to be brought back to it. Take, for example, the present economic system. It is not Christian. “It is monopolistic, parasitic, selfish to the core. We can no more pray for it than we can pray for the liquor traffic. We must pray against it; we must pray it away.

We must pray for the coming of the day when in its place there will be some form of a coöperative commonwealth in which the toiler will receive a fair share of the products of his toil, and in which the larger life to which he aspires will be made possible. In a spirit of true substitution we must put ourselves in the place of the disinherited ; identifying ourselves with their interests ; feeling the pressure of their wrongs ; echoing their bitter cry ; sympathizing with them in the blighting of their hopes ; and becoming their representatives before God, so that through our prayers the deep, unspoken desires of their hearts will find expression.

This brotherly ministry of prayer will help, as nothing else can, to deepen and strengthen the growing sense of social solidarity. It will bind men together in unbreakable bonds. Those who pray, and those who are prayed for, will be brought into oneness ; they will rise and fall together ; they will travel together into the land of promise ; and perchance they will come to look together through the mists and vapours of this troubled social atmosphere, and catch a vision of the place of prayer in the social order, as that mighty force, by which, even now,

“ The whole round world is every way  
Bound by gold chains about the feet of God.”

## VI

### Growth in Prayer Thought

**T**HE religions of the East are stagnant and stationary. They suffer from arrested development, and are either dead or dying. Among the religions of the world Christianity alone continues to make progress. It has in it something of the fire of eternal youth. It is a sunrise not a sunset. It holds the future in its hands. It claims for its own not only things present, but things to come.

The reason why it is sure of the future is because it has power to adapt its inherent growing life to changing conditions. In this it resembles the Bible, which is structured from beginning to end upon the principle of adaptation. It is the record of the development of truth from its crudest to its highest forms. It reveals a process of moral education in which every successive lesson was wonderfully adapted to the growing intelligence and quickened moral sense of those to whom it was given. Truth never changes, but our conceptions of it

do. Truth is eternal, but the terms in which it is expressed require to be frequently reminded. No definition of truth is final. Finality belongs to the divine, progress to the human. Browning is right when he

“ Finds progress, man’s distinctive mark alone,  
Not God’s, and not the beast’s.”

Now, it is simply inconceivable that there should be progress in every sphere of religious thought save that of prayer. If it be a living thing prayer will grow. Its development will correspond with the spiritual development of man, and with his increase in the knowledge of God. As a man rises in the scale of being, and towards God, so will he rise to higher heights in his prayer life.

The growth in prayer is strikingly illustrated in the difference between prayer in the Old Testament, and prayer in the New Testament. When we pass over from the Old Testament into the New we come into a totally different atmosphere. Not that a higher devotional note is struck; for the prayers of the Old Testament are unsurpassed as expressions of confession, adoration, and praise. The Hebrew Psalter in particular is the very efflorescence of the devotional spirit, and constitutes the high water mark of devotional literature. And yet in its essential spirit prayer at its best in the Old

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Testament falls far below that of the New. The one who is least in the new dispensation is greater than he who is first in the old. Among points of difference between Old and New Testament prayer to be noted are:

1. *The change from prayer to a localized God to prayer to an omnipresent God.* The Jehovah of the Jews dwelt among His chosen people; the house of His abode was in Jerusalem; there He was to be found, and thither the tribes of Israel went up to worship Him. The idea of a God who was everywhere present, as much in one place as another, came late, and was attained by only a few illuminated souls. The people in general, while believing that in the realm of nature God was universally present, were not quite so certain of His presence in the realm of human life. There were wide areas in their little world from which He was practically shut out. He was in some places, and absent from others; here and not there; there and not here.

The Christian God on the other hand is both here and there. There is no spot in all the universe from which He is absent. Wherever men seek Him they may find Him.

2. *The change from prayer to a national God to prayer to one who is everybody's God, and everybody's Friend.* The idea of a world-God, in friendly relations with suffering, strug-

gling men everywhere, was utterly foreign to Jewish thought. In the Old Testament Jehovah is the God of Israel, as against all other nations. He is a partisan deity, whose interests are limited to His own people; whose covenant is with His own people; and who in the day of battle fights on the side of His own people.

In striking contrast with this view of God is that given by Jesus, who represents Him as the Universal Father, to whom every one of His children is equally dear, and whose happiness is bound up in their individual welfare. The name of Father which Jesus applied to God was not, however, entirely new. The Jews used it in a national, but never in a personal sense. Heathen writers used it in a poetical, but never in a real sense. Jesus filled the name with a new content of meaning, making it a living term, expressive of a real and affectional relation between God and man.

The historical revelation which culminated in Him came to full fruition in the disclosure of God as a Father. To the heart-aching cry, "Show us the Father and it will satisfy us," He made answer, "He that hath seen Me hath seen the Father." In His human life all the essential qualities of divine Fatherhood were expressed. To lead men to know as their Father the God to whom they had been pray-

ing was the supreme object of His earthly mission.

By revealing God as a Father, Jesus revealed to man His true and original sonship, in which is founded the basis of every claim He has upon God. If a son, then an heir; if a son, then liberty of access and the right of petition; if a son, then a sharer in that paternal love which holds within itself the pledge of every needed good.

3. *The change of the approach to God by priestly mediation to that of direct access into His presence.* The Jewish system of priestly mediation arose very naturally out of the sense of unworthiness to appear before God inherent in man's sinful nature. At first the aid of some one more worthy, more holy, was sought. Then a certain class were set apart to the mediatorial office. But as the sense of the relation of the individual soul to God grew in the Jewish mind the service of the priest was more and more dispensed with, and personal fellowship with Jehovah came to be sought after. Once experienced it came to be looked upon as the highest boon to mortals given. The possibility of being shut off from this fellowship made the devout Jew shrink from Sheol. Because of his desire for unbroken communion with his God he began to cherish the hope of personal immortality. To

dwell in the house of Jehovah forever was his religious goal.

It was at this point of preparedness, when the Jewish system of priesthood, having served its purpose was breaking down, that Jesus came proclaiming the right of every man to freedom of access into the divine presence. When He taught the equality of men, as children of a common Father, the need of priestly mediation was done away with forever. One man was seen to be as good as another; as worthy of divine recognition as another; as much entitled to all the rights and privileges of divine sonship as another. Henceforth the whole race of men were to pray to the one God and Father of all, before whom every man has equality of footing; to whom every man can go for himself; and with whom every man may hold the close and intimate communion of a child with a father.

Christianity is the religion of the riven veil, and of the open door. The Christian needs no priest. The way for him to the throne-room is ever open, and when he enters it, unspeakable is his joy to find his Father upon the throne.

4. *The change from prayer to a God who has had to be propitiated to a God who is propitious.* The Old Testament saint prayed to God, entreating Him to be merciful; the New Testament saint prays to Him believing that

He is merciful. He has come to see that if any alienation exists between him and God, it is altogether on his own side.

It is not surprising that the prayer of the Jews should sometimes have sunk to the level of their heathen neighbours, to whom prayer was a matter of divine appeasement; a device to ward off the blows of a hostile power; an effort to secure divine intervention, or to extract from their god some special favour, especially to obtain from him victory over their foes in battle. But oftentimes it rose to a higher level, and became the confident appeal to one with whom they were on friendly terms.

In the parable of the prodigal son we have the New Testament representation of the true manner of man's approach to God. The returning wanderer receives a warm welcome. The Father sees him afar off, runs to meet him, presses him to his breast, and outpours upon his penitent soul all the wealth of his forgiving and restoring love. Room for doubt there is none; room for hesitancy there is none. The way to God is open all the way up from the lowest depths of degradation to a place in the Father's house, and to the fellowship of His undying, unchanging love.

5. *The change from prayer restricted and partial in its sympathies to prayer whose aims embrace the whole of human kind.* No pious

Jew ever thought of praying for his heathen neighbours. Of human brotherhood, and human solidarity, he had not the first glimpse. The truth that God has "made of one blood all nations of men to dwell upon the face of the earth" (Acts xvii. 26) had never dawned upon him. His praying was as provincial and as circumscribed as his life. It never got beyond "Let Israel flourish" to "Thy kingdom come."

Christian prayer, on the other hand, is cosmopolitan. A Christian is a citizen of the world. He prays for his own nation—for patriotism is part of his religion; but he does not pray for his own nation alone, much less does he pray for it as against any other nation. He prays for men of every race and tongue; and his supreme desire is that, whatever nation may rise or fall, the kingly rule of the Father among men may be everywhere advanced. In the interests of the Father's kingdom all his praying centers. To him nations are but human aggregates that grow and decay; that fulfill their purpose and pass away; but the kingdom of the Father for which he prays—which on the human side is the brotherhood of the loving and the true, is destined to hold on its conquering way, amid political and social upheavals, until at length it becomes part of the kingdom of heaven.

In the prayer which Jesus furnishes as a

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model He gives to prayer a social quality. It is a brotherly act. The pronouns which it employs are not "my" and "mine" but "ours" and "thine." No monopoly upon God, or upon His favours, is thought of. Nothing is asked in which the one who prays is not willing that others should have a share. Blessing is sought for those who are in need with the same disregard of worthiness that God shows in His dealings with us.

As water cannot rise above its source, Christian prayer cannot come from an unchristian heart; but only from

" A heart in every thought renewed,  
And full of love divine."

But alas! much of the prayer offered up by professing Christians comes short of the Christian ideal. In vain do you search in it for a single spark of altruistic fire. It needs to be born again. The tree has to be made good that the fruit may be good. For what a man really is determines the manner of his praying. If he is selfish he will pray selfishly; if he is a Christian he will pray Christianly; and if he prays Christianly he will pray with a world-wide sympathy and love.

6. *The change from prayer for vengeance upon enemies to prayer for forgiveness of enemies.* This is perhaps the most marked dif-

ference of all. Jesus Himself draws a contrast between the pre-Christian and the Christian attitude with respect to prayer for enemies. He says, "Ye have heard that it hath been said, Thou shalt love thy neighbour and hate thine enemy ; but I say unto you, Love your enemies, and pray for those that persecute you " (Matt. v. 43-45). This was a new rule of action, a new kind of prayer. Until Jesus exalted it into a virtue, forgiveness of injuries had been looked upon as a weakness. In His teaching it was set forth as the divinest thing in human character, "the thing the likest God within the soul," the thing which affords conclusive evidence that its possessors are the true sons of the heavenly Father. In vain we search the pages of the Old Testament for the slightest touch of this new spirit. The prayer for the forgiveness of enemies is there unknown.

The hardest lesson in all His teachings Jesus exemplified as He hung upon the cross. Instead of invoking Heaven's malediction upon those who were doing their worst to Him, praying for their destruction, He prayed, "Father forgive them." This spirit of forgiveness which He manifested was a new thing in the world. It filled the beholders with astonishment, and led them to exclaim, "We never saw it before on this fashion."

The spirit of revenge has no place in a Chris-

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tian heart; nor have prayers of imprecation any place in a Christian litany. "Chants of hate" and prayers of hate, which the war spirit calls forth, are utterly unchristian. Prayer for power to wreak vengeance upon an enemy is essentially wicked, and is an insult to High Heaven. A heathen may cry,

"Be ready, gods; with your thunderbolts  
Dash him to pieces,"

but that such a prayer should come from Christian lips is utterly inconceivable. Christian prayer will allow the sword to be drawn in the defence of hearth and home; or for the deliverance of the oppressed; but it will stay the hand that is uplifted in unrighteous war. It will lead those who are about to be hurried by unholy passion into the slaughter of their unoffending fellowmen to pause and say:

"Some unknown widow sits upon mine arm,  
And takes away the use of it, and my sword  
Glued to my scabbard with wronged orphan's  
tears  
Will not be drawn."

Those who pray in Christ's name will pray in His spirit; those who pray in the Holy Spirit will pray in a holy spirit. Those who refuse to pray for those who do them wrong are none of Christ's. They may call themselves Christians,

but they are blinded, not knowing what manner of spirit they are of. They virtually disclaim their divine sonship, and take their stand outside the circle of God's covenanted mercies.

7. *A change in the very spirit of prayer from the struggle and anguish of heart to confidence and joy.* The Old Testament saint was not always sure of God. He waited patiently *for* Him, whereas the New Testament saint when he rises to his privilege waits patiently *on* Him. He gives God time for the working out of His plans; and although the process may be long and trying he never doubts what the final result will be.

The idea that God is hard to find and difficult to persuade was at one time well-nigh universal. Dr. Alexander Whyte tells how James Fraser of Brea, one of the saintliest of the old-time Scotch ministers, "attained to a true and sure audience of Almighty God," as if this were something unwonted in Christian experience. "He never left the place of prayer till he felt sure that he had been in the king's presence, and had gained the ear of his sovereign, and had a gracious assurance of His favour." It was a long journey to the King's palace, something like that of Jeanie Deans in going to London to see the king that she might intercede in behalf of her unfortunate sister. But is such a journey really needed? Perhaps

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to find the *king*; not to find the *Father*. The Father can be found at home, among His children; yea, He can be found in our very hearts. In the acknowledgment of His presence all true prayer begins.

The long-drawn-out prayer of uncertainty and agony which characterized most of the praying of the past was utterly unchristian in its attitude towards God. It belonged to an age unduly influenced by Jewish ideals, and did not occupy the high place of freedom and assurance which belong to Christian prayer.

The Father whom Jesus reveals as the object of prayer does not stand upon ceremony. He is ever accessible, ever responsive. He does not spurn the poor petition of any child who in dire distress calls upon Him for help, even if he does not know His name, or address Him in a becoming manner. He answers him at once, pouring into his open heart the fullness of His saving grace, giving for love's sake, not on the ground of the petitioner's merit, but because of his great need.

The praying soul is entirely misguided when told to struggle with God, giving Him no rest until He yields. What a travesty upon the relation of God to man is implied in the encomium passed upon a certain saint, namely, that he was "a laborious and successful wrestler at the throne of grace." Never was there a sadder

form of misdirected effort than that of wrestling with God. All of a man's wrestling ought to be with himself for the purpose of overcoming his deadness and obstinacy of heart, and never with God for the purpose of overcoming His reluctance. Bengel says, "A Christian should not leave off praying until his heavenly Father gives him leave by permitting him to obtain something." Rather ought it to be said that a Christian should not leave off praying because he is sure that his heavenly Father will give him what he asks, provided it is best that he should have it.

Shortly before his death, when Europe was plunging into war, Pope Pius X made a tender appeal to the whole Roman Catholic world to pray for peace, urging them to pray with insistence "so that the merciful God may, as it were, be wearied with the prayers of His children, and speedily remove the evil causes of war." Not thus surely are we to pray, "wearying God with our assiduous cries." He is not like the unjust judge whom the importunate widow worried into compliance, but is ever responsive to the prayer of His children, and will give us the thing we need just as soon as we are ready to receive it.

## VII

### The Development of Prayer in the New Testament

**A** COMPREHENSIVE study of the growth of prayer-thought will include not only the contrast between prayer in the Old and New Testaments, but will concern itself with tracing the same law of development in the New Testament itself. At the beginning of His career as a teacher Jesus declared that He had many things to say to His disciples which they were not then able to bear. The truth which He taught was final, but never did He attempt to put it into final form. He taught by a system of progressive lessons. He provided no stereotyped forms. The prayer which we designate "The Lord's Prayer" is not a fixed form to be slavishly repeated, but a model to be freely imitated. When He said, "After this manner pray ye," He never meant His words to be taken as putting a foreclosure upon individual initiative in prayer, but merely as indicating the general lines upon which their prayers were to run. His closing prayer recorded in the seventeenth

chapter of John's Gospel has in it new elements which could not have been given at the beginning. It is a prayer to be imitated in spirit, and the praying soul that becomes steeped in it will occupy the holy of holies.

Certain elements entered into prayer after the completion of the sacrificial work of Christ, and the descent of the Holy Spirit, which could not possibly have entered into it before. When Christians could pray "in His name," and in the power of the Holy Spirit, they had reached a more advanced place in the prayer life.

The growth in prayer was part of the mighty movement set forth in the first Christian apologetic—the Epistle to the Hebrews. The two main lines which the thought of that remarkable book follows are the change from the outward to the spiritual, and from the limited to the universal. The sacrifices which it demands are "spiritual sacrifices"; the praying which it demands is spiritual praying. On the ground of the offering for sin, made "once for all" by the High Priest of humanity, it lays the basis of prayer for all men; and sees in the ever-expanding Christian spirit a power that is to conquer all racial prejudice, class exclusiveness, and religious bigotry; and make every forth-putting of effort on behalf of others blend with the world-embracing purpose of divine redeeming grace.

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A concrete illustration of this onward movement is seen in the liberation of Peter from his Judaistic narrowness, and his change from a Jewish Christian into a Christian Jew. When he was praying on the housetop of Simon the tanner at Joppa he beheld a vision of a sheet knit by the four corners, containing all manner of living creatures, and was commanded to "kill and eat." This he refused to do, on the ground that the animals were common and unclean. Then the voice that spake to him answered, "What God hath cleansed, that call thou not common"; and at once it began to dawn upon him that God's creatures are all good; that ceremonial distinctions whether applied to animals or to men are artificial; that true religion is a thing of the heart; that "God is no respecter of persons, but in every nation he that feareth Him and worketh righteousness is acceptable to Him." When these deeper truths came to him he was brought to include the Gentiles in God's covenanted mercies, and to make them the subjects of his prayers, and the objects of his evangelistic efforts.

Progress is seen in other directions, as for example in the change from the conception of prayer as simple petition to the conception of it as a working force; from its occasional exercise to its habitual practice; from protracted seasons of prayer to prayer "without ceasing"

—that is, prayer in which the whole man and the whole life pray.

A similar movement to that described in the Epistle to the Hebrews, in the Acts of the Apostles, and in the Pauline Epistles, is going on to-day. Changes as great and as significant are taking place before our eyes. There is a breaking up of the old order of things resembling the breaking up of ice-bound lakes and rivers in spring. Truth being vital and growing, rather than mechanical and static, refuses to be imprisoned in our formulas. Old truths are being restated in forms of life, so as to fit the thought of the present day. The old is giving place to the new, as it always has done, and always will do. In all this change it is evidently God's design that there should be progress, and that the enlargement and enrichment of the religious life should go forever on.

As an offset to this we find in some quarters a tendency to hark back to the past, and to seek the restoration of apostolic Christianity. But the only thing we should attempt to recapture and carry forward is the apostolic spirit. We are to shape our own religious habitation, "building upon the foundation of the apostles," and using what they have bequeathed to us just as we use the general knowledge and experience of the past in any other department of life. The edifice upon which we, and every

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successive generation of Christians work, is "a growing temple"—a temple which is never completed here.

In the very nature of things it is reasonable to expect that this onward movement should be nowhere more in evidence than in the growing fullness of the prayer life; for is not the prayer life the supreme test of the soul's growth? Present-day prayer should be the best the world has ever known. And it will be so if the Christians of to-day as "heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Jesus Christ," enter into their inheritance. Just as the praying Christian ought to stand on higher ground than any worshipper who went before him, being, as the Scotch would say, "farther ben"; so the modern Christian should stand on still higher ground than the Christian of an earlier day, occupying a place of wider vision, and of larger liberty, and of greater power. If he does not occupy that place he is certainly living below his privileges.

## VIII

### Gradations in the Prayer Life

**T**HERE are gradations in prayer answering to the ascending scale of knowledge and experience. Prayer, like life, of which it is a part, follows the natural order of development—"first the blade, then the ear, after that the full corn in the ear." The mystics speak of the ladder of prayer, the foot of which rests on the earth, and the head of which reaches to heaven, and insist that the praying soul ought to keep climbing from rung to rung until he reaches the top.

In the prayer of ascent there are three distinct stages.

1. *Self-prayer.* That is, prayer which is absorbed in self. A great deal of prayer is of this sort. It is intensely, yea, exclusively personal. It not only begins with self; it also terminates in self. If not necessarily selfish, it is at least self-centered.

At the beginning this is in a measure unavoidable, for a man's personal interests come first. He has to think of himself; his primal obligations are to himself. Even within the sphere

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of religious interests the question, "What must I do to be saved?" must precede the question, What can I do to save others?

In the list of a man's personal needs those of the lower nature claim attention first. Life begins in the physical. The primary wants of a child are physical. Beyond bodily necessities and comforts at first he does not go. But as his life expands so do his desires; and when he once finds out that he has a soul he begins to seek the things that belong to it. It is no discredit therefore to a man if his prayer life begins where his natural life begins; but there it ought not to stop. He ought to rise above that level, and give the primacy to the things of the spirit. The physical exists for the spiritual. Physical ends are relative and proximate; spiritual ends are absolute and final. When temporal ends are made supreme bitter disappointment is sure to follow; when spiritual ends are made supreme disappointment is impossible; for within the region of the spirit "Every one that asketh receiveth, and he that seeketh findeth, and to him that knocketh it shall be opened."

If prayer be in harmony with this divine order, that is to say, if it subordinates everything in the outward life to spiritual ends, it will show an upward movement, a continual aspiration after higher things which the eyes

see not and the hands handle not. It will give a new appraisal to life, a new meaning to religion; it will seek for the evidences of the divine acceptance, not in the measure of temporal blessings poured into the lap, but in the unsearchable riches of the spiritual kingdom poured into the soul. Alas, that so many Christians should invert this order, and pray as if life's true values were to be found in material things, thus falling back to the level of Judaism, which made riches, honour, and length of days the reward of righteousness. The rewards of the Christian religion are paid in the coin of the heavenly realm.

The nature of a man's praying shows upon what plane he is living, for men always pray as they live. "Low grade of being," says Bushnell, "wants low objects;" and high grade of being wants high objects. If a man lives on the physical plane he will pray on the physical plane; if he rises to the spiritual plane he will make spiritual things paramount in his praying. The heavenly Father is pleased if any one, like the prodigal son in the parable, comes to Him at first from bodily hunger, but He looks eagerly for the awakening of that heart-hunger which moved the prodigal later on. Knowing the relative value of things, He desires every praying child to spiritualize his praying, and seek first His kingdom and righteousness, leav-

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ing other things to be added or subtracted as He in His wisdom and love may deem to be for the best.

The objects of prayer within the sphere of the spirit are as varied as the conditions of life itself; but those that are essential and fundamental are simple and few. They have been reduced to two, namely, "mercy, and grace to help in time of need" (Heb. iv. 16)—mercy to cover all the sins of the past, and grace to help in the struggle of the future; the one meeting the universal sense of guilt, the other the universal sense of weakness. Powerless in himself to effect deliverance from the condemnation of a violated law, the sin-stricken soul is to cast himself upon the forgiving mercy of God; powerless in himself to rise out of the life of the flesh he is to fall back upon the uplifting, upholding, up-pushing power of God to sustain him in his heavenward flight. And to attain these indispensable blessings he is directed and invited "to come boldly to the throne of grace."

2. *Selfless Prayer.* That is, prayer which is absorbed in others. Those who reach this stage in the prayer life look no longer exclusively upon their own things, but look also upon the things of others. They lose themselves in their interest in others. As their prayer grows from individualistic to social, and

from social to altruistic its form changes from "Give *me*" to "Give *us*," and finally to "Give *them*." If they do not put the welfare of others above their own, they at least put it before their own, being willing to keep in abeyance their personal claims until the wants of others are supplied.

To pray in this way is to pray vicariously; it is to bear upon the heart the sins and woes of others; it is to identify oneself with them and make their case one's own. When this love-lit fire burns within the breast the dross of selfishness is consumed, and a good man's prayers become as altruistic as the rest of his life.

Prayer for others is a Christlike thing. In it the missionary passion finds expression. By it we are joined in one spirit to our Lord, and share with Him in the work of intercession in which He has been engaged since He passed into the unseen realm, thus coöperating with Him in the work of human redemption which He began when on the earth.

3. *The Prayer of Divine Union.* That is, prayer which is absorbed in God. To pray on this plane is to occupy the highest ground in the life of prayer. The soul who reaches it loses himself in God, and enters into His will in all things. And just because this prayer of union is the highest form of prayer, it is diffi-

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cult to attain, and still more difficult to maintain. To enter into it, and to abide in it calls for strenuous and continuous effort.

In the prayer of union the human will melts so completely into the divine will that we want nothing for ourselves that God does not want for us, and ask for nothing except what He has planned for us. No satisfaction whatever could be found in obtaining anything which lay outside of His will ; for the self-life being gone, His glory alone is sought, and the one desire of the heart is that His will may be done on earth as it is in heaven.

When fully possessed of the Divine Spirit it is no longer we who pray, but the Spirit of the Father who prayeth in us, and through us. He thinks through our brain, feels through our heart, and prays through our lips. As Isaac Pennington has said, "The breathings which the Father gives into the heart of the child are breathed back to Him in the same spirit of life." Or as a mystical hymn boldly puts it :

" O never think a prayer like this, as other  
prayers ; for know  
It is not mortal man but God from whom these  
accents flow,  
Behold, God prays. The lowly saint stands  
deep abased the while,  
And God who gives the humble mind, upon  
his prayer will smile."

This prayer of union is sometimes swallowed up in praise, and the experience is reached when all wants are met, and the soul delights himself in the possession of God Himself. But this is only an occasional mood. When Pierre de Coulevain exclaims, "I never ask God for anything, I simply adore and thank Him," she goes to an unwarrantable extreme. What ought to be said is, "Sometimes I cease to ask for anything, I simply adore and thank Him." Such a spirit of overflowing love is indicative of a deep and underlying trust.

## IX

### The Scope of Prayer

**W**E have already seen that one of the distinctive qualities of Christian prayer is the universality of its scope. It is not provincial in its spirit, circumscribed in the range of its sympathies or limited in the sweep of its interests. A Christian prays not for his own kith and kin alone, but for all human kind ; not for his own class or clan alone but for all sorts and conditions of men ; not for his own particular church alone, but for the whole Church of Christ ; not for his own nation alone but for all nations on the face of the earth.

Enlarging on this thought we would remark that —

1. *Christian prayer knows no spatial limit.* At the first Christianity was in danger of narrowing into a Jewish sect. For a time its free spirit was bound by Jewish fetters. The one who brought to it deliverance was Paul. To him, more than to any one else, was it given to bring Christianity into its own as a world-

religion, and to give to Christian prayer the world-wide reach which it now possesses. We can hardly imagine how revolutionary these words of his in 1 Timothy ii. 1 must have been, "I exhort first of all"—as if it were of prime importance—"that supplications, prayers, intercessions, thanksgivings be made *for all men.*" Up to the time these words were written no Christian Jew had ever thought of praying for a Gentile. And, indeed, so far was such an exhortation in advance of human experience that the Church has even yet hardly got up to it in its practice.

Out of this world-wide vision of the spirit and aim of Christianity was born the missionary movement which led the Church to push its conquests beyond its Jewish borders. As soon as it began to pray for all men, it hastened to fulfill the Master's commission of carrying the Gospel to them. And in doing this it did what the Church has done ever since—girded itself to bring to fulfillment its own prayers.

2. *Christian prayer knows no moral limit.* It looks upon every man as being upon the footstool of mercy. It is as deep in its reach morally as it is wide in its scope territorially. It regards no one as beyond the pale of hope—as being too far gone for the grace of God to restore him, or as having wandered too far from the fold to be found and recovered. The pray-

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ing Christian confidently asks, "Is there anything too hard for the Lord?" He believes that there is nothing that comes within the legitimate ends of prayer that God cannot do. He no more thinks of distrusting his resources in the spiritual world than in the natural world. He rejoices to think that God is at work in the secret places of the soul, restraining from evil, imparting helpful influences, and changing the thoughts and purposes of the heart. And when no indication is given of any moral change, he takes comfort from the reflection that no one can ever tell what is going on beneath the surface. It is this faith in God's measureless power that enables him to remove mountains. Because of it Jesus has said that to Him "all things are possible"; not, of course, all things absolutely; not things that imply a contradiction, or that conflict with the moral order that God has established, but all things within the circle of God's eternal purpose, and man's highest welfare; all things, in short, that a soul attuned to God's perfect will would care to have or would think of asking.

How often have we seen the seemingly impossible become the actual. A case in point is that told by Charles Darwin, who, when he first saw the wretched people of Terra del Fuego, considered them as hopelessly depraved; but when a few years after he revisited that

region and saw the transformation which the missionaries had accomplished, he marvelled, and became an ardent advocate and supporter of foreign missions. There is no man or race of men so far sunk as to be outside the pale of hope, and thus be past praying for. To have a place on God's fair earth is to be on praying ground.

3. *Christian prayer has no time limit.* Nowhere is it more urgently called for than at dying beds. It follows loved ones to the edge of the grave. But what of those who have fared forth into the unknown? Have they gone where our prayers cannot follow them? Perhaps we have been too ready to assume that they have. We are still bound to them by close and tender ties. They are still the objects of our interest and love. If our hearts are allowed to speak would they not instinctively cry after them:

“How can I cease to pray for thee? Somewhere

In God's great universe thou art to-day ;  
Can He not reach thee with His tender care ?  
Can He not hear me when for thee I pray ?  
What matters it with Him who holds within  
The hollow of His hands all worlds, all space,  
That thou art done with earthly pain and sin ?  
Somewhere within His care thou hast a place ;  
Somewhere thou livest and hast need of Him ;

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Somewhere thy soul sees higher heights to  
climb ;

And somewhere still there may be valleys dim  
That thou must pass to reach the hill sublime,  
Then all the more because thou canst not hear  
Poor human words of blessing, will I pray.

O true, brave heart, God bless thee wher'so'er  
In His great universe thou art to-day !”

The secrets of the life beyond are jealously guarded ; yet so long as the conviction abides that the living and the dead are bound together in indissoluble bonds, prayer for the dead will be looked upon as something other than “an unchartered liberty.” It is surprising to find how many earnest souls pray for their loved ones who have passed within the veil, but say nothing about it. Have they any ground for such prayer ? This much may at least be said : If the New Testament does not encourage it, neither does it forbid it. We know that the early Church gave it a place in its litanies, and included it within the range of its teaching and practice. Listen, for instance, to St. Cyprian as he exhorts, “ Whosoever of us goes home before the other, by the speed of the divine favour, let our affections continue before the Lord ; and let our prayers for brothers or sisters cease not before the mercy of the Father.”

The Protestant position is the result of a

revolt from the Romish doctrine of purgatory, according to which the destiny of the dead can be affected by the prayer of the living, and "spirits in prison" may be delivered and helped on their upward way. For such a doctrine the teaching of the New Testament furnishes no support whatsoever.

The majority of Christian believers put a restraint upon prayer for the dead, under any form, and rest in the Infinite Goodness, trusting the unknown for the known. A few—and their number grows—no less reverent, humble, and trustful, project their prayers into the world beyond. They believe that God's universe is one, and that when they touch the spiritual all boundary lines disappear. They believe that prayer should embrace God's final purpose, which includes the home-coming of every wandering child, and the glorification of every imperfect saint. That all prayer which lies within the sweep of His redeeming purpose should be well pleasing and acceptable to Him, they feel well assured. Are they mistaken? Can the prayer of mortal man ever outrun the thought and love of the Infinite God? Who shall dare affirm it?

## The *Pleroma* or Fullness of Prayer

**T**HERE are elements of truth in all religions. Christianity does not contain all the truth ; what it contains is the fullness of truth. As Clement remarks, "It gathers the separate fragments of truth and makes them one." It comes to every soul struggling towards the light, and says, "Yet show I unto you a more excellent way." In like manner there are elements of good in all prayer. Christian prayer is not the only true prayer, but is the *pleroma*, or fullness of prayer.

An interesting line of study within the domain of comparative religion would consist in comparing Christian prayer with other forms of prayer. Most departments of comparative religion have been pretty thoroughly traversed, but comparative prayer seems to have been in a great measure overlooked. We have been so much taken up with discussing the points of difference that we have sometimes lost sight of the underlying unities. We are just beginning to see that all prayer, being one in origin, and one in object, has many elements in common ;

and that therefore praying souls everywhere may find much upon which they can unite. But Christian prayer, while having many points of vital contact with all true prayer, has differentiating elements which put it in a class by itself, and distinguish it from all other prayer, just as Christian ethics are distinguished from all other ethics. It can accompany those who are outside of its circle as far as they are able to go, but it goes farther. It is superior to the highest forms of heathen or of Jewish prayer; and while gathering into itself all that is good in them, it adds much that is new. To it belongs the glory of being a religion of completeness and fulfillment.

Perhaps in nothing is the fullness of Christian prayer more fully brought out than in the way in which it embraces and combines all that is essential in the various forms in which man makes his approach to God. Of these forms the most distinctive are the following:

1. *Men come to God as creatures to a creator.* This is the common naturalistic ground upon which all praying souls stand together. They have a common sense of creaturely dependence, a common trust in God as the underlying ground of their lives. They come to Him as "unto a faithful creator" (1 Pet. iv. 19), who keeps faith with man in the revolution of the seasons, and in the orderly operation of his

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laws. He is a God who can be depended upon ; and yet He does strange things. He is loved and feared, He is sought and shunned. The pleasant things in nature are His smiles ; the terrible things in nature are His frowns. On the mountain top, under the stars, men build their altars to Him. They find Him everywhere in His works. They hear Him in the winds, they see Him in the flowers ; they feel the touch of His mysterious presence in their hearts. All nature is a temple in which they worship Him. They pray to Him not only because they depend upon Him as the Great First Cause, but also because they see in Him the primal source of every earthly blessing, and the Mighty Friend whose unseen hand supplies their every need.

2. *They come to Him as subjects to a king.* That is an aspect of prayer common to men who have outgrown their nomadic life, and have come under some form of regal government. They begin to think of God in terms of kingdom, and to address Him as a king. They look upon Him as seated upon a throne "high and lifted up"; they venture into His throne-room with awe and trembling, counting it a special mark of favour to be given an audience; they present their petition before Him with profound humility, and wait with bated breath the announcement of His sover-

eign will. This was the mould into which the prayer of the Jewish people naturally ran. Jehovah was their king: and as such they made their appeal to Him. They came before Him saying, "Let the king hear us when we call." "Hearken unto my cry, my king, and my God."

Christian prayer has absorbed this idea, as the familiar lines indicate :

" Thou art coming to a King,  
Large petitions with thee bring,  
For His love and power are such  
None can ever ask too much."

This attitude is right, inasmuch as the relation upon which it is founded is real. God is the great moral governor of the universe. We are all His subjects. At His throne we are to humbly bow when we approach Him in prayer, touching the golden scepter of His mercy which He holds out to us, and making our requests to Him in the confidence which the knowledge of His love and power implies.

3. *They come to Him as priests to their God.* Every religion has its priests—its go-betweens, who are supposed to be on terms of peculiar intimacy with their god, and are able to secure for others special favours which they are unable to secure for themselves. The necessity for the aid of these go-betweens has arisen from the

sense of personal unworthiness on the part of the suppliant. His sin has separated between him and his god, and he has felt the need of a mediator to plead his cause. So deep-rooted has been this sense of need that priesthood has outlived all the changes that have taken place in the constitution of society. It has often been a hollow pretension, and has flourished by the craftiness with which it has imposed upon the credulous; it has shrouded itself in mystery, and surrounded itself with pomp and ceremony; but not by its appeal to the marvelous, the mysterious, and the spectacular, but by its grip upon the conscience has it retained its hold upon men. It is a standing witness to the imperishableness of man's religious nature.

Recognizing man's inherent need of a priest or mediator Christianity sets forth Jesus as the one in whom that need is fully met. His priesthood is superior to all others; it supersedes all others. For its coming all other priesthood prepared the way. In it the priestly ideal found complete expression.

But Christianity goes still farther and declares the universal priesthood of believers, thus doing away forever with a priestly class, and giving to every divinely anointed soul the right of access into God's holy presence. This idea is presented explicitly by Peter, who, speaking of the whole body of believers, describes them

as "a holy priesthood," "a royal priesthood" (1 Pet. ii. 5, 9). They are holy in the sense that they are separated from the world, not literally, but morally; they are royal in the sense that they exercise their priestly functions as princes of the royal household, being sons of the king. They constitute the highest order of priests ever known among men, taking rank with Christ, under whom their priesthood is held, and in whose name it is exercised. The "spiritual sacrifices" which they offer are sacrifices of the highest grade, and mark them off as the divinely chosen ministrants to sense-bound souls of the priceless things which belong to the kingdom of the spirit.

4. *They come to Him as sons to a father.* This is prayer at its best—the *pleroma* or fullness of prayer. A son stands closer to his father than a priest to his god. To him belongs freedom of intercourse with his father. A son of the household whose heart is right, is always at home with his father.

Till Christ came this mode of approach was unknown. When He uttered the startling words, "No man cometh unto the Father but by Me," there came the eager reply, "Show us the Father, and that will satisfy us." In answer to this He said, "He that hath seen Me hath seen the Father," thus announcing Himself not merely as a revealer of the Father, but as a

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*revelation* of the Father. In a poetical and national sense men had known of God as Father before this; now, seeing the Father revealed in a human life, they could know Him in living, loving, personal relations. In this new way of approach to God is found the climax of the self-revelation of God to man. This is the last lesson in prayer, as it is also the first. Farther than this God could not take the human race in His age-long course of education. And closer to God than this relationship implies they could not get.

While these four conceptions of prayer all blend together in Christian experience, the greatest of them is the last. A praying Christian may sometimes go to God as a creature to a creator, as a subject to a king, as a priest to his god; but his prevailing attitude will be that of a child to his father. This is the way that Jesus went; it is the way in which He taught us to go; and it is the only way in which is to be found the fullness of a life of prayer.

## XI

### Intercessory Prayer in Its Highest Form

U P to the present time the priestly form of intercession is the one that has almost exclusively obtained in Christian thought. As set forth in the Epistle to the Hebrews, the high priesthood of Jesus has been held, and rightly so, to carry with it, by implication, the priesthood of believers, and their participation in the intercession of their great high priest. They are to fill up that which remains of His priestly sacrifice and mission. They are to join with Him in the desire that He may see of the travail of His soul, and be satisfied. As priests they are to offer prayers that bleed—prayers that have in them the sacrificial element—prayers that are accompanied with the sacrifice of self.

The priestly form of intercession will never die out, inasmuch as it expresses one of the vital truths carried over from Judaism into Christianity, and constitutes the central and vitalizing element in every phase of sacerdotalism ; and yet it is passing strange that it should so often have been taken as the only form in

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which the doctrine of Christian intercession has been set forth. A wide and careful reading of the New Testament on the subject of prayer will bring increasingly into view another form of intercession, namely, *brotherly* intercession. And this is the highest form of all. As the prayer of a son to a Father it is the highest form of personal prayer, the prayer of a brother for a brother is the highest form of social prayer. Sonship is above priesthood, for sonship is a natural relation, while priesthood is an official relation. In the possession of the spirit of sonship brotherly intercession is implied. When God sends the spirit of His Son into our hearts, whereby we cry, "Abba, Father," we begin at once to think of our brethren and to pray for them. And when Jesus gave His disciples their first lesson in prayer He taught them to pray in a brotherly fashion, joining with all God's praying children in saying, "*Our* Father, give *us* our daily bread; forgive *us* our debts; lead *us* not into temptation, but deliver *us* from evil." It is as if one member of God's great household asked the Father's blessing upon the other members, as if one brother asked the Father's blessing upon his known and unknown brethren. But no one figure of speech can exhaust a spiritual reality. For instance, the names and titles given to God present different angles of truth,

but all together do not express the full truth. Sometimes the blending of metaphors is called for because of the poverty of language. We have an example of this when Paul speaks of the Church as "a *living* temple," and of individual Christians as "*living* stones" in the temple. So when we speak of the Christian as a priest we may describe him as a brotherly priest, and when we speak of him as a brother we may with equal propriety speak of him as a priestly brother. In a current magazine article Father Kelly, Chaplain of the Ohio State Penitentiary, is spoken of as "the strangest priest you ever heard of": his strangeness consisting in the fact that he is "the elder brother of sinners." It is this strange kind of priest that every Christian ought to be. Alas, that the species should be so rare!

In introducing the subject of the high priesthood of Jesus the writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews unites the brotherly and priestly elements in one by saying, "It behooved Him in all things to be made like unto His brethren that He might become a merciful and faithful high priest in the things pertaining to God" (ii. 17). That is to say, His identification with men as brethren was a necessary condition to the proper exercise of His priestly office on their behalf.

We have been too ready to give to the pray-

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ing of Jesus an exclusively priestly cast, when it is better interpreted in the terms of brotherliness. It is noteworthy that the high priesthood of Jesus is referred to only in the Epistle to the Hebrews, and that we might expect, inasmuch as that epistle is addressed to the Jews who thought in the temple imagery, and it says much for the charm and significance of this particular figure that it has been hallowed throughout the Christian centuries, and is unto many to-day as vital as it ever was. But no symbol is of the essence of truth ; nor does any symbol exhaust the truth. There are other forms in which the intercessory work of Christ may be expressed besides that of a priest—forms which will convey to many a deeper prayer significance. The man on the street, at any rate, will understand us if we speak of Christ's intercession and our own, on his behalf, as brotherly, rather than priestly.

A striking illustration of the way in which the priestly idea has been read into the praying of Jesus, where it obviously does not belong, is furnished in the title which is generally given to Christ's farewell prayer to His disciples, recorded in the seventeenth chapter of the Gospel by John. It is almost universally spoken of as His great high priestly intercessory prayer. How it ever came to receive that title is a marvel ; for there is in it not a single shred of

priestly quality. From beginning to end it is addressed to the Father, as all the prayers of Jesus are, and it is to be interpreted not in the terms of priesthood but of brotherhood. It does not suggest a high priest praying on behalf of those without the veil, but a brother standing beside his brethren asking the Father's benison to rest upon them. In that prayer, in which He closed His earthly work, He gave expression to what was deepest in His heart. He prayed for the unity of the household of faith; for their present sanctification and ultimate glorification; and in view of the fiery trials which were about to break upon them He committed them with tender affection unto the Father's hands. The flavour and spirit of His prayer is brotherly rather than priestly, and it might well be called The Farewell Prayer of the Great Elder Brother.

One thing is certain: the tendency to-day is towards the brotherly rather than the priestly idea of intercession. The spirit of democracy is in the air. Thrones are toppling. Democracy is coming like a flood. Our conception of God as Father is leading inevitably to the democratizing of the idea of His rule among men; and the time-worn phrase "the kingdom of God" will in time be supplanted by the more appropriate phrase "the republic of God," and even where the old phrase may still be retained it

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will have a new content of meaning. The vision of John of "a kingdom of priests" (Rev. i. 6) has already lost its attractiveness. The social goal to which men of to-day are looking forward is not to be realized in universal priesthood, but in universal brotherhood.

The modern view-point is that expressed by John in the words, "If any man sin we have an advocate with the *Father*, Jesus Christ the righteous" (1 John ii. 1). Here the intercession of Jesus is set forth not as that of an advocate pleading the cause of his client before a judge, but as that of a brother pleading the cause of his brethren before a father. The one "who ever liveth to make intercession for us" is one who wears our nature. The High Priest is our Elder Brother. His advocacy is a brotherly act, pleasing to the Father; for who is so responsive as a father? This is intercession in its highest and final form—for closer than this no intercession can ever get. It is also intercession in the form that fits into the thought and mood of the times. We no longer think in sacerdotal or juridical terms. We think in terms of living relationships, and the kind of intercession that appeals to us is that of a brother going to a father and asking some favour for his brethren. That we can understand; for within the circle of human relationship it is an every-day experience.

The conception of intercessory prayer as a brotherly act, springing out of a brotherly relation, and as the appeal of one child of the Father on behalf of another, will preclude forever the possibility of any one ever falling into the error of supposing that the end of intercessory prayer is to awaken God's interest, or to overcome His unwillingness, and to stir Him up to action. As a Father He is solicitous about the welfare of all His children, and is glad when any one of them enters into sympathetic relation with Him regarding any other, and begins to labour along with Him for the accomplishment of the thing upon which His heart is set. Brotherly intercession will be no less sacrificial than priestly intercession. It will call for self-denying effort, and for soul-sweat. When a brother battles for a brother's soul there will be a new Calvary. That way redemption lies.

## XII

### Prayer as a Spiritual Force

**I**T is within the upper realm, the realm of the spirit, that prayer has its chief field of operation; hence it is to this sphere of things that we must mainly look for evidences of answers to prayer. Yet just because the answers to prayer within this sphere may not always be susceptible of demonstration we are apt to miss them altogether. The outward is the obvious; and with regard to the things of the spirit "we walk by faith, not by sight."

When Jesus saw that His followers were fixing their thoughts upon His miracles as the chief proofs of His Messiahship, He said to them, "Greater works than these shall ye do, because I go unto the Father" (John xiv. 12). Through the power of the Spirit, which He was about to bestow, they were to perform greater works than healing the sick and raising the dead—works demanding a higher kind of power. Moral miracles were to be wrought by them, consisting of healing sick souls, and bringing to life those who were spiritually dead; and by

these "greater works" their message was to win more convincing attestation.

To this higher ground the Church of to-day is to move in her prayer life by furnishing in the moral transformation of the soul and of society, which prayer effects, the higher evidence which the age demands. Physical wonders have become so common that this age has ceased to be greatly moved by them. Its challenge to the Church is not to outdo the miracles of Christ, but to show that she has power sufficient for the greater work of the world's regeneration. Can she heal the wounds of humanity? Can she meet the immeasurable needs of hungry souls? Can she win to righteousness a world lying in wickedness? Can she bring a world that is hostile to God into subjection to His sovereign sway? Can she save those who are lost? Can she give life to those who are dead? The world is waiting to see whether, as she prays for these things, her prayer possesses any potency to bring them about.

If we examine the testimony of Christian experience throughout the centuries, it will be seen that the main value of prayer has always been found to consist in the spiritual blessings which it has conveyed to the soul. It has brought comfort in sorrow, peace in trouble, strength in weakness, light in darkness, hope in

despair. The riches which it has bestowed have been the unsearchable riches of the spirit. And with the praying man himself there has also been an unshakable conviction that in some unknown way his prayers have been the means of conveying spiritual benefit to others.

When we look at prayer apart from its reflex influence, and especially when we come to inquire into its action upon others, it is seen to be a distinct kind of psychic energy flowing out from the praying soul into the world's life—a sublime form of telepathy by which impulses and suggestions are transmitted to those who are "psychologically attuned" to the one who prays. It makes direct impact and impression upon other souls, and creates a new atmosphere around them, in which better purposes more readily come to fruition. But that is not all. It connects with God; draws down His blessing; opens a channel for the outgoing of His saving energy; affords Him a medium through which to work; supplies conditions which enable Him to do things which otherwise would have been impossible.

When we attempt to understand this interaction of the human agent and the divine actor in prayer we touch the mysterious. Enough for us to know that along the connecting lines of personal love and sympathy, which our prayers establish, God ever works, doing all

that He wisely and righteously can to bring about the desired result. But the refractory nature of the material with which He has sometimes to work must be taken into account—which is another way of saying that in the final outworking of His power, when dealing with human souls, there is always an unreckonable element.

Were the conversion of a soul merely a question of the exercise of omnipotence it would be a simple matter. But moral beings must be acted upon by moral forces, and in harmony with moral laws. For their surrender even God must wait. The idea that a group of praying people can turn a battery of spiritual power upon a soul, forcing him to capitulate, is contrary to the law of mind. Not until man with his own hand holds out the white flag can the citadel of the soul be taken. An illustration of the power of prayer has been taken from an incident in the life of Sir Christopher Wren, the builder of Westminster Abbey. Wishing to make an alteration in the building, which involved effecting an opening in a thick wall, he used a log for a battering ram, and kept pounding at the same spot, day by day, until the wall gave way. The application made is that if we only keep pounding long enough and hard enough something will eventually yield. Usually it will. But prayer has to do

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with moral beings who have the power to resist every influence that can be brought to bear upon them ; and to assume that the irresistibility that belongs to physical force belongs also to moral power is to invite the possibility of the bitterest sorrow and disappointment.

But even when the final result has not been gained something has been accomplished. Every blow loosens some particle ; and some glad day, after hope deferred has made the heart grow sick, the massive stones may fall from their place, and an opening in the wall of opposition be made.

Prayer is like the making of a fire. We lay on the paper, the wood, and the coal, and at some unexpected time the divine spark may kindle them into a blaze. Although the prayers offered up through long years may show no visible results, they never return void, but are like the snow and rain which sink out of sight into the soil, and after many days cause the golden grain to appear, to "give seed to the sower, and bread to the eater."

In nothing we can do for others are we more in accord with what is deepest in the heart of God than when we energize in prayer for their salvation. His desire to see all men saved we cannot measure ; and we may be sure that He is leaving nothing undone to compass that end. In one of those wonderful flashes of spiritual

insight which are found in the Old Testament Isaiah declares that "from of old men have not heard, nor perceived by the ear, neither hath the eye seen a God beside Thee, who worketh for those who waiteth for Him" (lxiv. 4). With all the force of a new revelation the prophet states the truth that while we are waiting God is working. He is behind all things, with un-sleeping activity shaping them to His pre-destined plan. It may take Him a long time to bring about the things we ask, and that He has planned; hence we are to wait upon Him with calmness and patience. If in the case of which the Apostle James cites as a remarkable answer to prayer, it took three years to work out the result in the physical realm, need we wonder if in the spiritual realm it should sometimes take the eternities for God to fulfill His purpose. But whether the answer come soon or late He never forgets our prayers, nor does He cease His effort to bring them to fulfillment.

"The work began when first your prayer was uttered ;  
And God will finish what He has begun ;  
If you will keep the incense burning there  
His glory shall be seen, sometime, somewhere."

Upon prayer as a spiritual force the Church has to depend in her mighty task of world-con-

quest. It was when she was upon her knees that the Spirit descended upon her at Pentecost; and ever since it has been when she has been in that attitude that she has received fresh enduements of power to fit her for the task to which she has been called. It will be a sad day for her when she gives to prayer a secondary place, and is willing to accept any substitute whatever for it. When the Lord has to say, "My house shall be called a house of prayer, but ye have made it a social club, or an ecclesiastical show," her glory and her power have departed. It is as "a house of prayer" that the Church is to be known. It is when she has renounced all outward sources of help, and has fallen back upon God alone, that in her weakness she is made strong. It is when she has foregone the cheap and easy victories of the passing hour, and has travelled with her divine Lord along the way of humiliation, that she comes to the throne of power. The danger of to-day, when the calls to social service are loud and so insistent, is that by keeping her ear close to the ground to hear the movements of human life she may fail to hear "the sound of marching in the tops of the mulberry trees"—those mystical movements of the divine presence that presage the coming of the day of power. In the darkest hour, when mighty political, social, and industrial upheavals

are shaking terribly the earth, and the hearts of men are failing them for fear, there comes to her the call, "Look up, for your redemption draweth nigh." Through every change God is working out His purpose of redemption in the world; and of all that we can do to hasten on its consummation, there is nothing that can, for a moment, be compared in value with our faith-filled prayers.

### XIII

## Prayer in Relation to Natural Phenomena

**P**RAYER is a spiritual force in the spiritual world, from which it descends into the natural world. Professor William James defines it as "a process wherein work is really done, and spiritual energy flows in and produces effects psychological or material in the phenomenal world." There are many, however, who maintain that there is no place whatever for prayer in the phenomenal world, and they are ready to agree with James Thomson, the poet, that

"The world rolls on forever like a mill.

We grind out life and death, and good and ill ;  
It has no purpose, heart, or word, or will."

Others who would shrink from such a harsh view of the universe rule out prayer just as effectually by substituting "an unregarding law" for a paternal personality. But unless there is a living, loving Power behind all natural phenomena, prayer for the things which

we have been wont to regard as coming within the sphere of divine providence is utter folly. Very different is the view of those who with Sir Oliver Lodge regard prayer as "pressing through the husk, and apparently sensuous covering of the universe, and touching something living, loving, and helpful beyond." This is the Christian view, the view which Christ had, and which He has bequeathed to us. To catch this view is to discover a purpose in nature; for a world with a God in it is a world with a purpose. "It is a world that exists," as Bishop Francis J. McConnell has so well said, "for the service of persons whose individual souls are the supreme earthly objects of God's regard." And he adds, "The earth itself is but a material instrument for the help of souls."

The laws that govern the movements of God in the world are not always within our ken. At best we know only in part; but enough has been authenticated by experience to confirm faith in the efficacy of prayer as one of the forces by which God works in the natural world for the accomplishment of His purposes of grace in the lives of His children.

One of the most familiar tests of the power of prayer in the realm of nature is furnished by prayer for rain. A few years ago, when there was a severe drought in Kansas, there came an urgent request to the governor from all over

the state that he would appoint a day for prayer for rain. This he refused to do, saying, "I believe in the efficacy of prayer, but not in the case of flood or drought." This attitude, which is a very common one, comes from a mistaken idea as to the nature and end of prayer. Prayer for rain is not a sort of incantation such as is practiced by African rain-makers. Whether rain will immediately follow it or not depends upon what God thinks and wills about the matter. He is not running this world in the interest of big crops, but for the growing of big souls. In His scheme of things the material is always subordinated to the spiritual. Besides, our little patch of ground is not all that God has to care for. He has to consider the interests of others, and has to relate all He does for us to the whole cosmic process.

A pious mother had two sons, one a gardener, the other a potter. Said the gardener, "O mother, pray God for rain to water my plants." Said the potter, "O mother, pray God for sunshine to dry my pots." What could the perplexed mother do but leave the whole matter in the hands of the All-Wise?

But if God's laws are fixed what is the use of praying at all? We answer, They are not fixed in the sense that they are unalterable. They are not fetters by which He is bound, but methods by which He works. What we call the laws

of nature are simply the observed sequences of events, which show Him to be a God of order. Strictly speaking, His laws are not entities, but are merely the expressions of His mind and will, and may be changed or modified by Him whenever He pleases. It is inconceivable that He should be limited in any way by the thing which He has created. God is free, and the universe He has made is all open to Him, so that He can shape and control it according to the purpose of His sovereign will. All power is His. He has resources of which we little dream; hence He can do unheard-of things—things before which we stand in wonder and awe.

“ Lo, these are but the outskirts  
 Of His ways ;  
 And how small a whisper do  
 We hear of Him ?  
 But the thunder of His power  
 Who can understand ? ”

(Job xxvi. 14.)

Furthermore, as the All-Wise He knows every combination of circumstances, and can unlock every difficulty in our lives. On the ground of the new condition which prayer introduces He can materially alter the course of events so that disaster may be averted, and the things that were working for ruin may become bless-

ings unspeakable. It is always to be assumed that God knows what is best for one, and for all; but how He will act in any given case it is never safe to forecast. His ways are not always our ways. Hence as Thomas Goodwin, the English Puritan, remarks, "He sometimes claims and exercises both a great latitude and a great longitude in the way of answering His people's prayers."

" God answers prayer. Sometimes when  
 hearts are weak  
 He gives the very gifts believers seek,  
 But often faith must learn a deeper rest,  
 And trust God's silence when He does  
 not speak ;  
 For He, whose name is Love, will send  
 the best."

When we desire some temporal good it is therefore always wise to wait for intimation of God's will before proffering our request. It is said of George Müller that before making some new project the subject of definite prayer he often spent days and months brooding over it to find out whether it was in accordance with the divine mind. In the case of Elijah it is said that he prayed "according to the word of the Lord," some intimation evidently having been given him that a protracted season of drought was in God's plan. Elijah's prayer

thus coinciding with God's purpose could not possibly miscarry.

Sometimes prayer is held back, and we simply cannot pray for a certain thing which we greatly desire. At other times we are drawn out in prayer, and cannot stop praying. In this way God often leads us to know the prayers He means to answer. But at the end we must leave all to Him, and not feel that He must grant the particular thing we ask, and no other. For what are we that we should seek to shut Him up to our idea of what He ought to do?

If every outward sign should fail; if the calamity we dread should come; if the rain should not fall, and our fields should be barren; if earthquake, famine, or pestilence should come involving us in utter ruin, what are we to do? What can we do but make the Everlasting God our refuge? believing that in some way we do not understand all these things will be taken up into the eternal plan, and be made to work together for our individual weal, and for the weal of the world.

Prayer assumes a special providence; it assumes that God's care extends over every department of human life, and that He is concerned with individual as well as general well-being. Limit the area of God's providence and you limit the area of prayer. Let it be held that anything whatsoever in the lives of God's

children is outside of His providence, and the great volume of prayer daily offered up for divine help by those confronted by difficulties they cannot meet, and by disasters they cannot avert, is rendered foolish and futile. Most people pray because they believe that somehow their prayer has in it power to effect changes in the sphere of things within which prayer operates.

And just as prayer assumes special providence, special providence assumes the possibility of miracle; that is to say, it assumes that God is so deeply concerned about His children that under certain circumstances He is prepared, in answer to their prayers, to do unwonted things for them; and these unwonted things wrought on their behalf—which men call miracles, are, like the miracles of Jesus, evidences of divine grace just as much as they are evidences of divine power. The life of every praying man is so full of instances of divine intervention that miracles become commonplaces in his experience. Things are constantly happening to him which cannot be explained on any other ground than that God has altered and arranged things for his benefit. His whole life is a chain of miracles; yea, it is one continuous miracle.

His faith, however, does not depend upon signs and wonders. If they come he is glad; if

they are withheld he is satisfied. Whether prayer is answered in ordinary or in extraordinary ways matters not. The important thing for him is to discern the answer when it comes, and to accept it as from *Him*.

## XIV

### Prayer as Related to Bodily Healing

**T**HE Church of to-day is being shorn largely of her power because she is not exercising her healing ministry. Christ's work consisted of teaching and healing; ours consists of teaching alone. The new religious cults, such as Christian Science and New Thought, derive much of their influence from attempting to do what the Church has neglected. Ninety per cent. of those who join themselves to them are attracted by the promise held out of receiving physical benefit. Afterwards they struggle to understand and accept the explanation that is offered them as to the source of these benefits. Having secured the loaves and the fishes, they are ready to receive the things of the spirit.

The Church cannot allow this neglect of her healing ministry to continue. All things are hers. All power has been given to her to fulfill this part of her great commission. She ought therefore to lay hands upon the sick, praying for them in confidence that the Lord

will actually confer healing power upon them in answer to her prayer.

Prayer has a therapeutic value in itself. It quiets, soothes, and comforts, as nothing else can. As an exercise of faith it brings all manner of uplifting influences into the soul. But it does more; it connects the soul directly with the source of life, so that fullness of blessing is received for the perfecting of the whole man.

Of the blessings which prayer brings no one has a monopoly. With the divine healing energy flowing through the world any one can connect. The fountain of life is open to all; and to no one is given the exclusive right to dispense its waters in bottles which have a particular label affixed to them. The life-giving, health-giving power of God is free to all alike, and it is as available as it is free. The Church is an appointed channel through which it flows, but not the only one. So anxious is God to impart it that He will respond to any one who opens himself to Him, and who out of the deepest darkness of ignorance and superstition calls upon His name.

The healing power of God is ever in exercise. To every sufferer Christ still comes :

“ The healing of His seamless dress  
Is by our beds of pain ;  
We touch Him in life’s throng and press,  
And we are whole again.”

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To tell men of this precious, unseen, and mighty Healer is the mission of the Church.

Care however must be observed in defining the area within which prayer for the recovery from sickness is found to be effective. Not all who pray for their own recovery are healed; and not all who pray for the recovery of others have their prayers answered. When recovery is sought for selfish ends, or when no guarantee is given that the restored life will be devoted to useful ends, prayer will be unavailing. God always subordinates physical to spiritual interests. He is more concerned about our souls than about our bodies; about our character than about our comfort; about our holiness than about our health; and He will at any time sacrifice our physical to our spiritual welfare. He may not consider it advantageous to prolong an unprofitable life, and He may have better use to make, in some other world, of a profitable life. He may also be saving us from sorrow unspeakable by refusing to lengthen out a wasted life. When He denies, it is from love. Sickness being an evil it is natural for us to ask Him to remove it; but we must beware of dictating to Him, and are to leave every case to His disposal, seeking to adjust ourselves to His will instead of seeking to change it. Nor must we test the validity of prayer by the answer given to any particular request; for

whether God removes sickness, or allows it to remain and to run to its fatal end, we are to believe that He always does what is best, and are to sweetly rest in "His good, and acceptable, and perfect will."

The fact that God can and does heal when He sees fit is the main thing to be grasped. The way in which He heals is of secondary importance. Wisely to coöperate with Him it is necessary, however, that we understand in some measure the method of His working. Something is to be learned from human analogy. In his well-known book on "The Law of Psychic Phenomena" Dr. Thomas Jay Hudson finds the key to the solution of the problem touching the healing of disease in the law of suggestion. He endeavours to show that that law underlies and explains all the great healing movements outside the Church, and within it. In a measure it does; but the explanation which it gives, although true as far as it goes, is only partial. It leaves out of account the direct touch of man upon the Divine Healer through the exercise of faith. Now prayer moves along all these lines. It has suggestive power; it works with God at the center of man's being, and it awakens within man impulses which push him forward until he stands face to face with Him who is always "present to heal," and leaves him in His hands.

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The power to heal which belongs to prayer ought to be claimed and declared by the Church of to-day. It ought to be made a distinctive element in her witness to the Lord's presence. Her prayer meetings ought to be "testimonial meetings," at which those who have been sick in body and in soul shall bear witness to the healing, restoring power of the Living Christ. When that testimony is given the Church will have a new Pentecost.

## XV

### Prayer as Related to War

**W**HEN the tocsin of war is sounded a nation falls instinctively upon its knees, praying to the Mighty God in whose hands are the destinies of men. It makes its appeal to divine justice, believing as it prepares for battle that the arbitrament of the sword will prove to be the arbitrament of God.

But here is the difficulty. The contending nations are equally convinced of the justice of their cause. They pray to the same God, and confidently count on His exclusive assistance. It never seems to occur to them that the one to whom they make their appeal is not their God only, but that He is also the God of those who are fighting on the other side. Their attitude plainly shows that they are still enmeshed in the old conception of God as a tribal divinity—a conception which the Christian world is generally supposed to have outgrown.

Is there anything to determine which prayer will be answered? There is. The prayer that

will be answered is the one which is offered in the right spirit, and which seeks the right end. All other prayers will fall to the ground.

War is a great revealer. It brings to light the thoughts and intents of the heart. It also gives a vent to pent-up fires. If it does not make men cruel it affords an occasion for revealing their cruelty; if it does not create the tigerish lust for blood it awakens it; if it does not make men unforgiving it discloses their unforgiving spirit. When hate is exalted as "a sacred duty," and the demand of Christ that we love our enemies is characterized as "more impossible than ever for normal humanity," a descent has been taken into an inferno so deep that there can be no return from it save up a long and steep ascent, upon bleeding, penitential knees. If hate is harboured in the heart prayer is nullified. No prayer prevails but the prayer of love.

When the die is cast, and the soldiers, having been mustered from every town and hamlet, fare forth to battle—some light-heartedly, others sobered by the haunting fear of impending evil, all, or almost all of them are followed by the prayers of loved ones left behind. From thousands of mothers' hearts rises the cry, "O God, protect my boy, and bring him safely back." And the cry perhaps has hardly died away before he has to face the iron rain which

crushes him to his doom. Describing this experience under another form Tennyson pathetically exclaims :

“ O Mother, praying God will save  
Thy sailor,—while thy heart is bow'd  
His heavy-shotted hammock-shroud  
Drops in his vast and wandering grave.”

What a severe strain such an experience puts upon Christian faith ! No adequate explanation of it can be given. The mystery of it is too deep for the little sounding line of human knowledge to bottom. Part of its bitterness comes from its unexpectedness ; and the shock of its unexpectedness often arises from forgetting that prayer for the protection of the loved ones should never ignore the possibility of their not returning. The supreme sacrifice must needs be required of many ; may be required of *them*. In rare instances, for reasons of His own, God may intervene, staying the hand of the enemy, or covering the defenseless head with the shadow of His wing ; but usually He allows the stroke to fall ; and when it falls, if the stunned and bewildered soul cannot at once kiss the rod, he can at least trust God in the dark, and sink into His everlasting arms.

A still greater strain is put upon Christian faith when those who have been suddenly cut down have given no outward evidence of prep-

aration for the great change. Many, not satisfied to rest in the assurance that they are in the hands of Him whose mercy endureth forever, indulge in the hope that the sacrifice of life in a noble cause, having in it something of the spirit of Calvary, may be counted for salvation, as faith is counted for righteousness. Such was the belief of John Hay, the Christian statesman, as expressed in his lines concerning Jim Bludso, the engineer of the *Prairie Bell*, who when his boat caught fire :

“ Held her nozzle agin the bank  
Till the last soul got ashore,”

and perished in the flames.

“ He seen his duty, a dead-sure thing —  
And he went for it thar and then,  
And Christ ain't a-going to be too hard  
On a man who died for men.”

That the judgment will be conducted by Christ is in itself significant. It means that as the Son of man, who understands men, He will take every extenuating circumstance into account, and that His judgments, while according to justice, will also be according to grace.

Besides, God is not through with any one when he leaves this earthly sphere ; but those who pray for the salvation of their loved ones

may have a long time to wait, for it may take God a long time to bring the answer round. But one thing is sure: no prayer offered up for the welfare of another soul is vain. "The golden censers full of odours, which are the prayers of saints," do not represent prayers held in remembrance, but the prayers which still rise before the eternal throne as grateful incense—prayers that are still living and active, and are on the way to fulfillment.

As the conflict goes on there rises prayer for victory. This is often offered up in a spirit of utter selfishness. National glory and aggrandizement are sought rather than victory for the right. Seldom is the high altitude attained which marked the attitude of Abraham Lincoln, who, when a deputation of preachers waited upon him during the Civil War, asking him to appoint a day when the people should assemble together to implore God to be on the side of the North, made reply, "Gentlemen, do you not think it would be more becoming for us to see that we are on God's side than to ask Him to be on our side?" A profound utterance, and one that goes to the core of the question. The desire to be on God's side assumes that the mind will be kept open to His suggestions, and the will plastic to His touch. It assumes also that the possibility of being in error will be frankly acknowledged, and that there will be a

readiness to accept His plan, even if our own should have to be shattered. To occupy this attitude is to be freed forever from all torturing anxieties touching the future, and to be enabled to wait with tranquillity whatever of good or ill the future may have in store.

But more insistent than the prayer for victory should be the prayer for peace. Not, however, for peace at any price; not for peace by compromise, but for peace by righteousness. There are worse things than war, and a dishonourable peace is one of them. A righteous and honourable peace is the only kind for which God cares, and for which a Christian has a right to pray. Such a peace is not a mere cessation of hostilities, but the destruction of the evil spirit from which war springs; and that is the only kind that is lasting. Any other kind will prove to be merely a pause in which preparation is made for a more deadly struggle.

Those who sincerely pray for peace will do everything possible to bring it about. They will put aside all jealousy, envy, rivalry, hatred, and suspicion; they will go more than half-way in making concessions; they will take their full share of blame for allowing evils to go on unchecked; they will seek to redress any wrong which they may have unintentionally committed. In a word, they will embrace every opportunity offered of answering their own

prayers. But if the power to promote peace be so much in our own hands, why pray about it? For sundry reasons. And first, because prayer creates an atmosphere in which the war-spirit will wither and die. In the next place, because of its direct action upon belligerent human hearts, inducing them to sheathe their swords, and live in amity with those they have looked upon as enemies. Every desire for peace outbreathed in prayer enters into the world's life, and forms part of the sum total of influence by which the reign of righteous peace is to be established. It is also something through which God can work for the bringing in of that harmonious social order which is the end for which He is unceasingly working in the world.

The very act of prayer is in itself a means of promoting peace. It brings men together, and knits them into one. Let warring nations gather around the throne of grace as children of a common Father, and some way will be found for the amicable settlement of every international dispute.

Never does prayer more evidently flow into the stream of the divine purpose than when it expresses the longing and the hope for the end of war. Unless the vision of the prophets be delusive, war is one of the things that must pass away; and sooner than we dream we may

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hear "the bugles sound the truce of God to the whole world forever." But peace when it comes will not be secure unless the spirit prevails which prayer evokes. Treaties will be held inviolate only when the heart is true. No international police force will preserve the world's peace unless the hearts of men are emptied of hate and filled with love. Not by the application of external force in any form, but by the conquest of the universal heart by love will universal peace be won and kept.

It has been said that so long as there are two people left in the world there will be the possibility of a conflict. Not if their hearts have been changed by the power of love divine. But if the hell-fires within them instead of being extinguished have been merely banked they may blaze up at any moment. Without such a change of nature—a change so radical as to realize the prophet's vision of the lion lying down with the lamb—our hope for the world's redemption is vain, and our prayer for it is also vain. But holding to its possibility we repudiate the sentiment of Kipling's lines :

" Oh, East is East, and West is West, and never  
the twain shall meet,  
Till Earth and Sky stand presently at God's  
great Judgment Seat,"

and would substitute for them :

“ Yes, East is East and West is West, yet some  
time the twain shall meet,  
When brothers all, in love they bow, before  
Heaven’s Mercy Seat.”

But so long as human nature is what it is, so long as its selfish, willful impulses have not been brought into subjection to the divine will, wars may arise at any moment. Hence the need of some measure of defensive preparation. Yes, after all, the chief defence of a nation is that which is spiritual and invincible. “Salvation will God appoint for walls and bulwarks.” Kipling at his best teaches us to pray :

“ For heathen heart that puts her trust  
In reeking tube and iron shard—  
All valiant dust that builds on dust,  
And guarding calls not Thee to guard.  
For frantic boast and foolish word,  
Have mercy on Thy people, Lord.”

Mary Queen of Scots feared the prayers of John Knox more than all the armies of Europe. And in these days why should not the effectual, fervent prayer of a righteous man have more protective power than a super-dreadnaught? Woe to the nation that fails to rely on prayer as one of the forces by which its future security is to be maintained. A prayerless nation by cutting itself off from

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God is left to itself, and becomes shorn of its power. No nation is strong save in alliance with God. "Except the Lord keep the city, the watchman waketh but in vain;" and except the Lord guard a country its mighty fleets and armies will avail nothing. "There is no king saved by the multitude of a host." God alone is a nation's sure defence.

## XVI

### Prayer in Theory and Practice

**A** NEW philosophy of prayer will be of little value if taken as a substitute for an improved prayer life. We may have a better understanding of prayer than our fathers, and yet be poorer pray-ers than they. We may have more enlightenment and less faith; a better conception of God and less of the spirit of true devotion. If we know the more excellent way happy are we if we walk in it.

It is noteworthy that when the disciples came to Jesus saying, "Lord, teach us to pray," they did not ask to be instructed in the theory of prayer but in its practice. They were already praying men—like Daniel, and all good Jews, they no doubt prayed three times a day. But they were not satisfied with their prayer life. They wanted to pray better. They knew that Jesus had some secret which they did not possess. They wanted to know it that they might be able to pray in His way.

Prayer is an art that can be attained only

by practice. "We have," as Mrs. Elizabeth Prentiss has said, "to learn the mysterious art of prayer as an apprenticeship at the throne of grace." No one ought to expect to reach the high places of divine communion at a single bound. He must begin at the bottom, which is generally at a mother's knee, and patiently ascend step by step until he has reached the sun-lit heights where the God of glory dwelleth, and where His chosen meet Him and "speak to Him, face to face as a man speaketh to his friend."

It is only, however, on its formal side that prayer is an art to be cultivated by practice. On its inner side it grows as the soul ripens. Being essentially a thing of the spirit it may be strongest under the uncouthest forms. Its value is determined not by its rhetorical finish, but by its spirituality. The prayer of the *righteous* man "availeth much in its working," although it may come from stammering lips; whereas the prayer of the man who harbours sin in his heart availeth nothing even if perfect in technique and correct in thought. In prayer character counts.

The connection between theory and practice is the same as that between doctrine and duty, faith and works, or that between power and the application of power. To the theory of prayer which a man holds his practice will sooner or

later conform. As a man thinketh in his heart so he prays. If his thoughts touching prayer change his practice will change; if his belief in prayer dies his prayers will cease. We see this illustrated in the case of the philosopher Nietzsche, who, scorning meekness as a virtue, glorifying brute force, casting down the humble, dependent Christian from the eminence accorded him by the Master and setting up in his place a "superman" who has no need of God, saw no use for prayer. Yet he found it painful to give it up. His lamentation over the necessity for its abandonment is inexpressibly pathetic. He says, "Nevermore wilt thou pray, nevermore worship, nevermore repose in boundless trust—thou renoucest the privilege of standing before an ultimate wisdom, an ultimate mercy, an ultimate power; and unharnessing thy thoughts thou hast no content whatever and friend for thy severe solitudes—thou livest without gazing upon a mountain that hath snow upon its head and fire in its heart—there is now no redeemer for thee, none to promise a better life—there is no more reason in that which happens, no love in that which shall happen to thee—thy heart hath no resting place when it needeth only to find, not to seek; thou refuseth thy ultimate peace, thou desirest the eternal recurrence of war and peace;—man of self-denial, wilt thou deny thyself all this? Whence wilt

thou gain the strength? No one ever had such strength."

In striking contrast to the attitude of Nietzsche is that of a French socialist who, upon returning wounded from the war, was heard to say, "I am going back to the Church. Need teaches one to pray." In both of these cases the connection is clear between theory and practice.

In prayer as in everything else it is in practice that we are apt to come short. Prayer is often short-circuited. Some worldly obstacle checks the outflow of its energy; the power is cut off, and it becomes a dead wire. What is needed is to repair the break, and complete the circuit. It is not the measure of knowledge possessed regarding prayer, but the amount which we use that determines the quality of our praying. Power must be applied; the truth must be allowed to operate; theory and practice must be brought together.

Paul speaks of those who "hold the truth in unrighteousness"; that is, hold it in check; do not allow it to act, in order that they may continue in unrighteousness. In the same way many hold prayer in check. They know better than they pray. They do not let their souls out; they restrain prayer before God that they may remain undisturbed in a worldly life. If they allowed prayer to have its way it would

work changes in their lives which they are not prepared to make.

To develop the prayer-life two things are therefore needed—correct prayer thought, and the application of the knowledge gained. It is not enough to see that prayer is a psychic force, working telepathically; it must be made an agency of practical usefulness. By the power of strong volition helping influences must be sent by it to others. It must be made to radiate cheer and strength, health and peace. It is not enough to see it a great moral force working directly and indirectly through the laws which govern the transmission of moral influences; it must be consciously and energetically used for the accomplishment of moral ends. Those who pray for the spiritual welfare of others must believe that something is being done in answer to their prayers. They must believe that every prayer they offer has some effect in securing the final result. Nor is it enough to see in prayer a great social force, working for the Christianizing of the social order; it must be definitely employed to send into the polar sea of human life a warm gulf stream of altruism, which will raise the moral temperature, and cause fruits and flowers to grow where before was icy desolation.

But not only must prayer release force within the soul, and send it forth on its mission of help-

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fulness; it must also bring power down from above, and by connecting God's fullness with man's emptiness, bring reënforcement to human weakness, redress to human wrongs, repair to human ruin, thus achieving individual and social redemption.

## XVII

### Prayer and its Formal Expression

**I**N describing Christians according to their degrees of spiritual development George Fox divides them into three classes, namely, those who are "without forms, in forms, and above forms." This description applies in a very special sense to the different stages at which men have arrived in the prayer life.

1. Those who with regard to prayer are "without forms" are those whose praying is as yet unformed. It has not begun to function. It is in the nebulous condition which characterized the earth in its earliest stage when it was spoken of as "without form and void." This class often possess a goodly measure of interest in what Nehemiah calls "the outward business of the house of God"; their lives are often filled with useful activities, but are empty of anything like definite praying. Their souls have not found speech. They are God's dumb children. Occasionally they may be startled into a sudden outcry after God by the fear of some impending disaster, or by some shock of trial, but they have not got into the habit of

daily prayer. That generally comes by a process of gradual growth.

As a thing of the spirit prayer may exist as unvoiced desire, for it is the heart that prays, and the lips only give formal expression to that which rises to the surface from the soul's unfathomable depths. But in the completed act of prayer heart and lips are united. At first the response to God may be faint as the answering pressure of the babe whom the mother is pressing to her breast; and the soul's first cry may be that of "a child crying in the night, with no language but a cry;" but as the sense of God's presence grows, and the need of His help is increasingly felt, the soul will struggle for more definite utterance. And God looking on will thrill with joy when there comes to Him that for which He has longingly waited. For He wants to hear His child's voice, and to have intercourse with him. To every silent child He comes, saying, "Wilt thou not from this time cry unto Me, My Father?" No greater joy can one give Him than by responding to His call, and coming to Him as a suppliant child.

2. By those who are "in forms" is meant those who are in bondage to forms—those to whom certain forms have become a necessity. There are many such—many who have come to need some outward form on which to lean,

as a vine needs a trellis, or as a person weak in limb needs a crutch. It is by no accident that forms have been so largely used. They meet a felt want. A great part of the literature of devotion has consisted in providing prayers in which the soul can find expression. In her public worship the Church has elaborated stately rituals in which prayers general and special have a prominent place. That these prepared prayers have been extensively useful goes without the saying. They have given direction to the prayer impulses; they have also helped in the cultivation of the prayer habit; and habit is the warp and woof of life, the stuff out of which religion is made. On the other hand the use of set forms tends to formalism. Habits may be so regular and fixed as to become mechanical. Not prayer-forms alone, but forms of speech may become time-worn, and by constant repetition may lose their original significance. No form is of the essence of truth. Forms of some kind are necessary, but no particular form is. All forms are subject to change, and have frequently to be recast to suit existing conditions and needs. The danger of becoming tied down to forms, and thereby losing the naturalness and freedom that belong to true prayer, is one against which Scripture raises its voice of warning. It declares that the body without the spirit is dead;

that a man may have the form of prayer while denying the power thereof. Neither the use nor the disuse of forms availeth anything, but a right spirit. The use of forms is justified only so far as they are helpful to the nourishment of the devotional life; when they have ceased to be helpful the sooner they are thrown aside the better. "If the salt have lost its savour, wherewith shall it be salted? It is thenceforth good for nothing but to be cast out and trodden under foot of man."

3. Those who are "above forms" are those whose praying is spontaneous and free—the outbreathing of God's free spirit. They are above forms in the sense that they are independent of them. They do not deny their use to others, and upon occasions they may use them themselves, but they do not need them. They do not soar on borrowed wings. They speak to God for themselves, and in their own words.

An illustration of this free and informal intercourse with God is furnished in the case of Dr. Bushnell, who thus testifies: "I fell into the habit of talking with God. I talk myself asleep at night, and open the morning talking to Him." These "bed-prayers," as an old Scotch divine calls them, are often the best part of our praying. In them artificiality vanishes and we become natural—a thing which

God surely likes in His children. For is it seemly that a child should be formal and ceremonious when in converse with his Father?

This kind of prayer has its dangers also. It may lead to undue familiarity, and the absence of becoming reverence. To maintain a proper spiritual balance is not easy. Just as the use of set forms is apt to make a man a formalist, so the absence of forms of any kind is apt to cause the prayer-spirit to vanish into thin air; and just as a man may be in bondage to a religion of forms he may be in bondage to a religion which is above forms. "Where the Spirit of the Lord is there is liberty"—liberty all round—liberty to discard or to employ forms as the spirit may prompt, and as the need of the hour may demand.

## XVIII

### The Psychology of Prayer

A STUDY of the psychology of prayer is interesting and profitable, inasmuch as it helps us to trace the operation of the mind in prayer, thus showing in what prayer consists; yet it is no more necessary to understand the psychology of prayer in order to pray than to understand the chemical properties of food before eating it. The important thing is not the *modus operandi* of prayer, but the practice of it; and the knowledge of the action of the mind in prayer is valuable only as it leads to more intelligent praying. That it may and ought to lead to that result is a valid reason for pursuing the study of it.

The psychology of prayer deals with the contents of consciousness, and the contents of consciousness furnish our most trustworthy source of knowledge. The knowledge thus acquired rests upon a firmer basis than our knowledge of the external world. The external world is illusive. All we know about it is what we gather from our five senses, and

they often trick us. What we have in consciousness is first-hand knowledge. What a man knows of himself he knows as he knows nothing else.

Considering the subject of prayer from a psychological point of view, what do we find? We answer we find that it is :

1. *A conscious act.* It is this even when an attitude of spirit, it being an attitude consciously taken, a spirit consciously cherished. All that goes on in the laboratory of the subconscious mind is only preparatory to prayer; prayer itself is the emerging of the soul into consciousness. According to J. R. Illingworth prayer is "our conscious response as free beings to God's invitation; the effort on our part to enter into that intercourse with Him which He on His part desires us to have." It is true that all God-inspired impulses and desires find expression in every part of life, so that the whole life may be said to pray. A look, a sigh, a tear, are prayers; and God who reads the heart as an open book responds to these mute appeals. When the lips are dumb the soul may speak, and its praying may be as unceasing as breathing, as continuous as life itself. Dr. R. C. Cabot forgets this when he argues that "we can as reasonably speak of poems without words, music without notes, landscapes without colouring, life without consciousness, as prayer

without words." Prayer is often voiceless, but it is never unconscious. When we pray inwardly and silently we pray consciously.

The soul that feels the touch of God's presence and seeks to respond to it will not always keep silent before Him. His prayer which begins as an attitude will end as an act. Sooner or later it will take the form of distinct petition expressed in speech. And nothing short of this is full grown prayer.

2. *A personal act.* The study of psychology has emphasized the idea of personality. It has made man an object of new interest to himself. It has not allowed him to forget, even in his loftiest flights, that he is himself; not a fragment of the divine, but a divine fragment; not a part of the Infinite, but in kinship with the Infinite. He is not lost in God as the river may be lost in the desert sands, but has a personality as real as that of God Himself; so that in every act of commerce between himself and God the relation of one personality to another is assumed, and all their dealings together are the dealings of one self-conscious being with another.

There is nothing perhaps in which the play of personality is more in evidence than in prayer. Prayer is something in which God and the individual soul are alone concerned. It is emphatically a personal act. A man may

be prayed for by others, but that does not exempt him from the necessity and duty of praying for himself. There are many things he can do by proxy, but praying is not one of them. Even when he unites with others in prayer his personal petition must be a separate note in a general symphony, a separate stream flowing into and through the mighty river of united petition. No prayer voiced by another is his until he prays it over again and makes it his own.

3. *An individualistic act.* The psychologist looks upon every man as a distinct creation, standing apart from all other men, and possessing certain differentiating qualities which mark him off from them. He has all the qualities of the species, with certain more or less pronounced variations. There is no other person exactly like him. If therefore he is true to himself and lives his own life in his own way, he will do his own praying in his own way. His praying will not only be natural, but it will be original in that it will be his own production. It will not be the echo of some other voice but will be the expression of his own experience, however feebly and stammeringly it may be given.

Here we touch the main objection to stated forms of prayer, which is that they are the prayers of other men. We may make them

our own, and find much help in their use, but we shall lose much if we do not supplement them with prayers of our own minting—prayers that are our very own.

When a praying man is himself; when he prays naturally and freely, and is not afraid to let himself out; when he goes forth on a great adventure into the realm of spirit, taking an unbeaten path, and blazing his own way through the forest, he is praying at his best. God does not want any one to tell Him what other people have thought and felt; He wants him to tell Him what he thinks and feels. In prayer as in everything else man should stand upon his own feet, and be himself.

4. *A spontaneous act.* Looked at under this aspect prayer is an emotional impulse wrought out in the secret places of the subconscious mind, coming from these hidden depths like a spring bursting from the ground, and often breaking forth at unexpected times and places. Held for a time in solution, in the form of a vague desire, which hardly knows what it wants, when it comes to itself and knows what it wants it is precipitated into definite and concrete petition. Out of desire prayer is born. "Prayer," says the Westminster Shorter Catechism, "is the offering up of our desires to God"—and a better definition could not well be given. Desires are prayers.

The Lord is said to "fulfill the *desire* of them that fear Him"; and we read, "Delight thyself in the Lord, and He will grant thee the *desire* of thine heart;" that is to say, He will give it before prayer is full grown, and when the desire itself is as yet unuttered.

Desire is a magnet by which the soul draws all things to itself. "The thing we long for that we are." As Katherine Lee Bates puts it,

" Know that men's prayers shall be answered,  
 And guard thy spirit's desire,  
 That which thou wouldst be, thou must be,  
 That which thou shalt be, thou art.  
 As the oak astir in the acorn  
 The dull earth rendeth apart,  
 See thou, the soul of thy longing  
 That breaketh and waketh the heart."

It is the heart that prays. Out of the heart are the streams of devotion. When the mind muses the heart burns, and when the heart burns the tongue speaks. We brood over our condition and needs, and before we know it we are praying; we brood over the wants and woes of others, we think of their baffled hopes, their bitter failures, their blindness to life's eternal issues, and our hearts are stirred with sympathy, and our prayers flow forth. Prayer then comes without restraint. To use Beecher's figure, "we do not push it through like

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driving a wedge into a log ;” it comes of itself, free and unconstrained, and is as natural as breathing.

Behind all effective praying there is intensity of feeling. Lukewarm prayers lack projectile force ; fervent, importunate prayer rises or falls to the level of the fountain of desire. By the intensity of desire the power of prayer is to be measured. Those who desire little get little ; those who desire much get much. The more importunate the cry of any human soul, the more does it move the heart of God, and the more intense his desire to obtain some special blessing the better prepared will he be to receive it, and to be benefited by it.

5. *A rational act.* It is not a thing of *blind* desire—a mere impulse of the affections, but is an exercise of the intellect, a dictate of reason. When men pray truly they follow the lead of reason as well as of the heart.

In the midst of a wild storm of fanaticism, when the people around him prayed in an unknown tongue, Paul stood unperturbed, refusing to surrender his intellectual integrity, or to abrogate his reason, affirming, “I will pray with the understanding also” (1 Cor. xiv. 15). In taking this position he was acting in harmony with sound psychological principles ; for if reason be man’s chief prerogative nowhere is its exercise more imperatively demanded than

in that act in which it is put to its highest use.

6. *It is a volitional act.* Man prays because he wants to pray, not because he is forced to pray. Every impulse to pray he can ruthlessly crush. He can put the hand of restraint upon the mouth of his soul and keep it from speaking out, or contrariwise he can give it voice; he can chain it to earth, or allow it to soar to heaven; he can keep it moving among the things of sense, or send it out into the invisible. When desire swells his sails he can keep his hands upon the rudder of his will, and direct his prayer to definite ends; and when the desire to pray is absent, and the need to pray is on that account all the greater, he can hold himself to the exercise of prayer as a duty.

The will is the center of personality. It is a positive force sending out streams of vital energy; it is a creative force initiating changes, and beginning new things. So that a man, if he wills it, may at any time turn his soul to God, and begin to pray. "The will to power" he may not always possess; but the power to will is something of which he can never be robbed; and so long as he has that power prayer is something he can render, and hence it is something for which he is responsible.

7. *An act of the whole man.* It calls into play every part of the spiritual nature, bring-

ing them all into harmonious combination and into united action. This demands strenuous effort. In the New Testament souls are represented as "striving in prayer," as the trained athlete strives for mastery in the games. It is anything but easy to pray well, and especially to pray well and long. There is no spiritual exercise that calls for greater soul-strain. The keeping up of regular habits of prayer is beset by the difficulties which belong to sustained mental effort of any kind; it is also beset by moral difficulties; for when heaven is pulling the soul up, earth is pulling it down; and man requires to stir himself up to lay hold on God and keep energizing Godward. To be successful in prayer he must pay the price of putting into it all his heart, and mind, and soul.

This much, at least, finds verification in the study of the psychology of prayer. But psychology has its limits, and all its attempts to dissolve personality into its constituent elements and compel it to give up its secrets is vain. There is much that baffles the observer, eluding his analysis, and upsetting all his previous conclusions. Nor has it anything to say touching the divine side of things. As the science of the soul it is concerned merely with the soul's workings; but the mysterious action of God upon the soul lies beyond its ken. Where psychology leaves us

theology takes us up. As the science of God it makes Him known, that men may come into right relation to Him, and know Him as the one who hears us when we pray, and who reciprocates every movement of mind and heart towards Him. This side of things is known only to him who prays. Although he may not be able to demonstrate it to others he knows within himself that things are done for him in answer to prayer that nothing save the operation of the power of God can explain. If he that believeth hath the witness in himself, equally true is it that he that prayeth hath the witness in himself.

## XIX

### Practical Prayer—or Prayer as it Appeals to the Modern Man

**T**HE question, “What profit shall we have if we pray unto Him?” is one which Job puts into the mouth of worldly men; men who are destitute of the knowledge of God and His ways. Those who know God and pray to Him never ask such a question. Indeed the more a man prays the less questioning has he touching the efficacy of prayer.

It is because of the deep-rooted conviction that prayer is of use, that it makes things different, that more things are wrought by it than this world dreams of that men continue to pray. When confidence is lost in the practical value of prayer, when men cease to believe in it as profitable, the practice of it soon drops out of their lives.

The first question therefore is, What is practical prayer? In other words, What are the elements which entering into prayer make it practical?

1. *Practical prayer is prayer that makes connection with God.* A great deal of prayer never reaches God. It lacks propulsive force, and stops on the way. It may be formally addressed to Him, but it fails to reach its destination. Often it is directed to human ears; or it is sent out to wander in the viewless air until it is hopelessly lost.

The story is told that when certain workmen were repairing the ceiling of a church, one of them found a neatly tied bundle among the rafters. "What have you there?" he was asked. "I suspect it is a bundle of the dominie's prayers that never got above the roof," was his reply. If prayers could be materialized it is to be feared that a pretty large collection might often be found lodged in the same place.

According to Auguste Sabatier prayer is "the movement of the soul putting itself into personal relation and contact with the mysterious power whose presence it feels even before it is able to give it a name." Strictly speaking that is rather a preliminary of prayer. Prayer is the communion that follows. Hence the first thing required in order to make prayer practical is to find God before we begin to pray; to prepare our hearts to seek Him, and not to rest satisfied until we connect up with Him, and establish ourselves in His presence, thus avoid-

ing the folly of attempting to send our message when the transmitter is down.

2. *Practical prayer is prayer that answers its intended ends*; answers, that is, the ends that prayer was meant to serve. Now, what are the true and legitimate ends of prayer? We answer: Its ends are twofold.

(a) *It was designed to be a means for getting things from God.* This is the common view regarding it, and it is correct as far as it goes. We get many things from God, just as we get them from one another, by asking for them. "Ask and ye shall receive, seek and ye shall find, knock and it shall be opened unto you." The things secured by prayer embrace the whole circle of human interests and needs; nor is anything that concerns man a matter of indifference to God, or too insignificant to take to Him in prayer.

That prayer often obtains for us substantial material benefits goes without the saying. Many are ready to testify that they have gone to God in financial straits, in sickness, and in trouble, and He has brought them relief. Indeed, most of the recorded answers to prayer spoken of as "remarkable" are of this kind; and usually when men speak of profit in prayer they are thinking of some temporary advantage derived from it. Others, swinging to the opposite extreme, deny to prayer any value what-

ever along this line. Among this class was the poet Whittier, who though wrong in his main contention was right in saying that "when men put faith on that material ground there is no wonder that Tyndall should propose a prayer test. He is challenged to it by such views. If a man seeking after truth puts faith on the material plane, it is fair that he should propose to test it in that way." That test, when made, has proved to many a rock on which they have made shipwreck of their faith.

A boy was told that God would give him whatever he asked. He happened to want a steam engine, so he prayed for that; but it did not come. He prayed the second time with the same result. The third evening he said, "O Lord, I have asked you twice already for that steam engine; now it is three times and out; and if it does not come by to-morrow morning, I will worship idols." That boy was logical; but his premise was wrong. What is overlooked in such a case is that the promise "all things whatsoever" has certain provisos attached to it, the chief one being that it is restricted to all things in harmony with God's will. God has not promised to give us all the things we *want*, but all the things we *need*. Prayer is not the means of getting from God the things we happen to clamour for, but the things He deems it best for us to have. As the

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lines of the original of Montgomery's hymn or prayer—but omitted from recent versions—expresses it :

“ Prayer is appointed to convey  
The things that God designs to give.”

But whatever doubt may exist regarding the material advantages of prayer there can be none regarding its spiritual advantages. It is undoubtedly the chief means of nourishing the spiritual life. By it we are brought to the fountain of life, where our souls renew their youth and regain their freshness and vigour. By it we receive the undergirding of divine power for the struggle of life. So necessary is it as a means of grace that no growth in holiness can be attained without it. Those who allow the grass to grow over the path that leads to the place of secret prayer decline in spiritual interest and power. Prayer is the soul's battle ground where victories are won, or where we go down in defeat. If we fail there we fail everywhere.

(b) Prayer has a higher end to serve than being the means of getting things from God ; it is also *the means of doing things for God*. It has a place all its own in the Christian system, as a distinct form of social service. When a man prays he is doing something besides going through a pious exercise. He is

engaged in real work. He is setting in operation forces that affect the well-being of humanity, and that working in harmony with the ordained methods of social influence connect him with everything in the world that makes for human weal. And not only so, but he in his prayer supplies a new condition for the working out of the divine purpose, so that it is not merely something that God can use, but something that He cannot do without. The praying soul thus not only does things *for* Him, he does things *with* Him. He is His "fellow-labourer." A thoughtful little girl once said to her mother, "I have been helping God to-day." "What have you been doing, my child?" she asked. "I found a flower half blowed, and I blowed it." Something like this is what we do by our prayers. We help God to develop undeveloped lives. We pray them into goodness. We create around them a new atmosphere; we breathe upon their half-opened hearts, and cause them to expand in the beauty of holiness.

Of all the forms which coöperation with God can take there is none more potential than this, and none more beautiful. It is the highest form of divine service that life can offer. Fortunately, it is open to all, so that any one who is shut out from life's outward activities can rejoicingly say :

“ And so we work together,  
My Lord and I.”

And the share in the final result, of the humblest, weakest saint who prays in faith, the Lord Himself will be the first to acknowledge.

3. *Practical prayer is prayer that turns the power which it evokes to practical account.* It goes into the invisible realm, and brings its riches into the earthly realm. It brings down power from the upper sphere to operate in the lower sphere, belting it to something, so that it moves something, and produces something.

A great deal of this power is often allowed to run to waste. It simply makes the wheels go round, without grinding any grist; or it has an output ridiculously small. The utilization of this waste power is one of the things urgently demanded. Power so great, so wonderful, as that which prayer evokes, ought to produce results at which the world will wonder.

What St. Paul says of faith may be said of prayer—“without works it is dead, being alone.” When alive it is not alone, but has good works in abundance clustering around it. It not only vitalizes and makes effective existing agencies, it inaugurates new movements.

What the praying soul asks for he will be ready to work for. Sometimes he will convert his prayers into ballots, sometimes into bullets;

at all times he will convert them into those things which will lead up to prayer's answer. His tender beseeching on behalf of sinners will lead him to plead with them to be reconciled to God ; his prayers for the poor will lead him to minister to their relief ; his prayer for the afflicted will lead him to carry to them the cup of consolation and press it to their lips. He will not pitch his tent permanently on the mount of transfiguration, but will leave its celestial glories and delights for the work that awaits him in the valley below ; he will not tarry too long in the upper room, but will go forth from it clothed with the Spirit's power to be Christ's messenger of grace to a needy and dying world.

4. *Practical prayer has regard to the relation of means to ends.* It expects God's blessing only when the necessary conditions have been supplied.

When we pray for bread God puts work into our hands, and the bread comes ; when we pray for bodily healing He directs us to the use of suitable remedies, and the sickness is gone ; when we pray for the removal of pestilence God leads us to adopt proper sanitary measures, and the pestilence stalks away discomfited. The times when He sends the loaf direct, or heals by miracle, or stays the plague by his omnific fiat are few and special. He often

helps by direct action those who cannot help themselves, but He never helps those who can help themselves except by securing their active coöperation.

It is one of the commonplaces of religious thought that in the work of the world's redemption prayer is always to be connected with the right use of means. Before God can answer our prayer He has often to wait until we do our part.

“ No answer comes to those who pray,  
 Then idly stand,  
 And wait for stones to roll away  
 At God's command.  
 He will not break the binding cords  
 Upon us laid  
 If we depend on pleading words,  
 And will not aid.  
 When hands are idle, words are vain  
 To move the stone ;  
 An aiding angel would disdain  
 To work alone ;  
 But he who prayeth and is strong  
 In faith and deed,  
 And toileth earnestly, ere long  
 He will succeed.”

A striking illustration of the relation of means to ends is given in the prophet Ezekiel's vision of the valley of dry bones. The prophet was asked to inspect the bleached bones of a mighty

host which had been slain in battle, and found them to be "very many, and very dry." When asked, "Son of man, can these bones live?" it seemed to him scarcely possible that such a desperate condition of things could be remedied, and that a people whose power had been so completely shattered, and whose spirit had been crushed by slavery, could be restored to their former glory; so he wisely answered, "O Lord, Thou knowest." While he did not see how it could be done he put no limit to the power of God. He was then told to prophesy to the people, saying, "O ye dry bones, hear the word of the Lord." He was also to prophesy to the wind, and say, "Come from the four winds, O breath, and breathe upon the slain that they may live." The two agencies which he was to employ for the revivification of the nation's life were preaching and prayer—the one a manward force, the other a Godward force. These are the agencies which God has always employed for the moral restoration of the world. In the divine plan they are always united; and what God hath joined together let no man put asunder. Where there is no motion of spiritual life, no response to God's appeal, we must not cease to preach; for in this sphere of things the dead can hear; nor must we cease to invoke the outbreathing of the Holy Spirit, for no other and no lesser

power can infuse life into dead souls, and transform dry and scattered bones into a united, conquering host.

The thing which the prophet was to declare was "the word of the Lord." He was to proclaim a divine message, which was to be the connecting medium between dead souls and God's quickening power. Here it is that we often fail. We do not supply the proper medium through which God can work. Sermons on science, poetry, or history are non-conductors. Punk is a poor substitute for dynamite.

The facts of the Gospel are the media through which the saving power of God reaches the heart of man. The Gospel is the power of God unto salvation because of the saving truth that is lodged in it. To pray for the salvation of men without using the divinely appointed means to save them is utterly vain.

5. *Practical prayer is prayer that sees the thing through which it has begun.* It does not knock and retire, but keeps knocking until the door is opened. It watches for the answer; it waits for the answer; it works for the answer. It does not indulge in vague and ineffectual longings, as in the case of a young girl who said to a prima donna, "I would give all the world if I could sing like that." "Would you give four hours a day?" was the reply.

The race is often given up when the goal is near—one spurt more and the prize would be won. How many of us recall a time when —

“ Just a few steps more  
And there might have dawned for me  
Blue and infinite the sea.”

But alas! the few steps more were not taken, and we went back heavy-footed and heavy-hearted without seeing the gladdening vision. Why does God delay? Why does He keep us praying and waiting? Not surely because He is unwilling or unready to give, but solely because we are unready to receive. He can have no interest whatever in withholding from us any spiritual blessing for a single moment. The disciples were kept praying ten days in the upper room. Why? Because they were not ready on the ninth. Our Pentecost will come just as soon as our preparation is complete.



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